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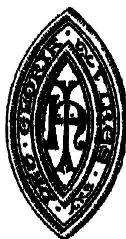
LORD OF THE CREATION.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "ETHEL."

"Nay, these are but the outside likeness of a man. They are of another sort who inherit those noble and excellent gifts essential to that which the angels recognise as MANHOOD."

Spanish Comedy.



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A

LORD OF THE CREATION.

Chapter i.

It was not generally supposed by his neighbours and friends, that old Mr Hesketh of Redwood had in his youth loved passionately and hopelessly. Nobody would have suspected it, looking on the grave and rather hard face, listening to the measured voice, and the dry, somewhat matter-of-fact opinions and observations he was in the habit of enouncing. Yet such was the fact. Doubtless, we pass by a vast number of such covert romances in the crowd of life. It almost follows that the possession of more than usually strong feelings, and deep capacities both for enjoyment and suffer-

ing, should entail that succession of mental and psychological phases which go to make poetry and romance in these days, when poetry and romance have their strongholds in the subjective portion of human affairs.

However, the more shrewd of the social critics in the neighbourhood of Redwood (so Mr Hesketh's manorial property was called) surmised something near the truth, when, one spring, his household acquired an additional inmate, in the person of a well-grown, frank-spoken, bright-faced little girl of nine or ten years of age. Miss Caroline Maturin was the daughter of an old friend of Mr Hesketh's, it was announced; she was an orphan and yet wore the black dress assumed at her mother's death. She had hitherto lived almost all her life in France; but her aspect was thoroughly English, and very pleasant. She would be handsome when she grew into a woman, Mr Hesketh more than once said; and the child herself liked to tell that she was very like "poor mamma." And by and by it became known that this poor mamma had been a very early friend of Mr Hesketh's;

that she had married a poor man for love, and had passed her subsequent life in much poverty and trial. Out of a numerous family, this girl alone survived, and—such are the chances and changes of fate!—to be, after all, a sort of heiress. Some distant relative left her parents funded property to the amount of £10,000—an affluence which they only lived to enjoy for a few months. The father died first, and it was during a visit to England—her first for many years—that the widow, meeting her old friend, entreated him to take on himself the guardianship of her child when she should be left motherless.

These facts creeping out, the feminine part of the community, at least, found little difficulty in imagining the rest. "Poor Mr Hes eth," they used to say, sometimes, and take great interest in observing the old man's growing fondness for his charge,—how he liked to walk about the park with her, how his face lighted up into a keener life when she was with him, and what evident delight was afforded him by her soon-aroused and rapidly-increasing affection for himself.

"Mr Vaughan Hesketh must look after himself," observed the lookers-on; "this new-comer bids fair to supersede him in his uncle's favour."

But they judged superficially, as lookers-on, even the acutest, usually do. They supposed that Mr Hesketh, having no children to whom to leave his lands and his wealth, had deliberately and advisedly adopted one out of his brother's large family to be his heir. Natural as this surmise appeared, it was not altogether correct. The old gentleman had simply taken the charge of his nephew's education since he was a child. Now he was a boy of sixteen, and at a large public school, from whence he only came to Redwood during alternate vacations. People wondered what he would say to the new member of the family he was to find there.

He came. To all appearance he was far from disapproving of the change in affairs. He liked society, perhaps, and was too much of a man to repudiate the companionship even of a little girl—particularly as the little girl in question was vivacious, intelligent, active, and clever, and practi-

cally sympathised with him in all his pursuits, and pretty nearly all his sports likewise. Decidedly, Vaughan Hesketh's vacations gained greatly in interest from the date of Caroline Maturin's introduction to Redwood. It was impossible to believe that there was any disaffection, any jealousy, on the boy's part. But then, after all, he was but a boy, and youth is proverbially thoughtless and unsuspecting, the much-interested gossips said among themselves. And they continued to say it until they were tired, as, day after day, week after week, the good understanding between the young people evidently increased and waxed strong, till at length "a body could see with half an eye," Sally the dairymaid said to Stokes the groom, "that Master Vaughan and Miss Caroline were as fond of one another as could be—quite like brother and sister, sure-*ly*." Stokes gravely shook his head at this last assertion, and took leave to doubt the continuance of the species of relationship named; "and really," he remarked, "the circumstances of the case and the age of the parties was so sing'lar suitable, that he couldn't see what

possible objection there could be to a nearer and solemn-er alliance between 'em." Still, as the future bride was at this time scarcely ten years old, the speculation may be pronounced premature. And, meanwhile, all seemed settling itself comfortably and harmoniously. Vaughan, the tall, lithe schoolboy, and Caroline, the bright-faced, fleet-footed, cricket-playing, marble-loving little girl, who was yet a thorough girl, in spite of her boyish predilections—these two were great friends. Old Mr Hesketh was much gladdened thereat, and, like a wise man, asked for and hinted at no more for the present.

* * * * *

"Come," said Vaughan, "put away that stupid book, and let us go out for a row on the lake."

Caroline was deep in the "Arabian Nights," and had ensconced herself in a corner of the sofa, in one of those queer and intensely comfortable-looking attitudes into which children seem to fall naturally under such circumstances. He spoke twice before she heard.

"I say, come along."

This, aided by a tap on her shoulder from the long switch he held in his hand, aroused the rapt little reader. She looked up, her large eyes all dazed and wondering, at this sudden summons back to real life.

"I'm going out on the lake. Come; I'll give you another rowing lesson."

"Oh—directly?" with a pathetic glance at the dear book, and a rapid turning over the leaves, to see how far it was to the end of Prince Ahmed's adventures.

Mr Hesketh looked up from the secretaire at which he was writing; he peered at the boy and girl from over his spectacles. "Vaughan!" he called out, rather sharply, "probably your cousin" (they called each other cousin, and the old man himself was "uncle" to Caroline, as well as to his veritable nephew)—"probably your cousin would prefer reading her book to going out on the lake. You would give a fellow-schoolboy the privilege of choice, I presume; you owe at least as much deference to a lady."

Vaughan coloured, bit his lip, and turned

aside, swinging his switch with embarrassed vehemence.

As for the poor little "lady" in question, she sprang from her cosy corner, flung aside the engrossing volume, flushing up all the time till her face was like a red June rose, and her eyes shone through sudden dews—"I want to go, uncle. I asked Vaughan to teach me to row. I like it—of course I like to go with him. He would not have asked me, if he did not know that."

"Very well—very well," muttered Mr Hesketh, going back to his papers; "settle it your own way." He shrugged his shoulders, with a half-smile, nevertheless, curving his mouth, and a not displeased gleam lighting his eyes.

Vaughan strode out at the door into the corridor, in sublime silence. Caroline followed. He took down his cap from the peg where it hung beside her own hat and garden tippet. Having pulled his cap well over his eyes, he put his hands in his pockets, and proceeded to whistle while slowly walking round the billiard-table, which occupied the centre of the hall. At the door,

however, he suffered himself to be arrested by the third repetition of Caroline's deprecating cry, "Oh, Vaughan!"

"Well, what is it? I'm going out. I told you so."

"I know. Don't you want me to come with you?"

"Certainly not; you are otherwise occupied, I understood."

"You are cross; that's not right. It was not my fault that your uncle spoke to you."

"Do you think I mind his having spoken?"

"I know you do," she said, quietly; "but you ought not to be angry with me because of that."

"Who said I was angry?"

"You are cross, sullen. I don't like you when you look as you do now. You may go out by yourself, if you choose it."

Her candour, her fearlessness, had something attractive in them to him, it would seem; for, even while she spoke, the look to which she objected disappeared from his face. A smile wavered across his features; the coldness of his glance melted into something more familiar, and very pleasant.

"Oh, come along; *do* come, Caroline; we'll

have a famous afternoon. Here, I'll reach you your hat."

He reached it, put it on for her, and awkwardly tried to tie the strings, laughing down at her fresh, spirited face, now all glowing with glee.

They went out. It was early spring, and the sun was shining. The air seemed tingling with new and exquisite life. Caroline's step quickened to a run that was almost a dance; her upturned face looked as though it actually gathered in some of the sunshine. Presently her clear voice broke forth in a fragment of some French *chanson*—one of the few indications which yet remained of the child's early foreign experiences.

"Never mind that 'Ange de la prairie,'" cried Vaughan, impatiently; "if you must sing, sing 'Malbrook,' or 'Le cordon bleu'—something like tunes they are."

Caroline obeyed—her companion whistling an accompaniment with great clearness and precision. In the very middle of a bar, however, the little girl stopped, and darted half-way up the steep bank beside which they were going.

"What in the world is the matter?"

"Primroses—just look!"

Two roots, side by side, nestling in a sort of cleft, as primroses best love to grow, with brave green leaves sheltering several timid little buds, that yet contrived to have a peep at the strange world they had crept into.

"Well, are you going to pick them? Can't you reach? Come down, and I'll get them for you."

"No; I don't want to gather them—only to look. Aren't they pretty, Vaughan?"

"Oh! all very well—yes, pretty, if you like."

"Don't you like them yourself?"

"Yes, of course — not as you do, though. Flowers are girls' things; I'm not a girl."

"Well, but ——" began Caroline, meditatively. However, her objection remained unuttered.

Vaughan commenced whistling shrilly, and walked on at an increased pace. Presently Caroline resumed her song. Her careless trill sounded pleasantly and joyously on the quiet.

"'Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,'"

sang she, while Vaughan tried under his breath to

imitate the pretty French accents which flowed so easily over her red lips.

"Caroline," he interrupted at length, "how is it you never talk French now? I suppose you can speak it just as well as English, can't you? When you first came to Redwood, you talked English with an accent, like a French child ——"

"Did I?" said she, with a sudden sadness. The sunshine went out of her face; the ready tears gathered in the large, steady eyes. "I don't like," she faltered; "it hurts me—a little—talking French—because—mamma—before mamma died ——"

And there her voice fell, and a very courageous effort was made to keep back more tears.

"Oh," Vaughan replied, with a clumsy endeavour at a consoling tone, "that's more than a year ago. Now, you know ——" He stopped, feeling boyishly awkward, probably, for sympathy is very nearly the rarest of masculine characteristics, and even in the kindliest soils seldom reaches the height of manifestation in early life. "Well," he went on, "it's a pity you don't like talking French."

"Why is it a pity?"

"Because you'll forget it, and it is always useful; and, besides, we might have talked together, and it would have got me on famously."

"Oh, Vaughan! would it really?"

"Of course it would. Nothing would make it so easy as talking to you. We'd have regular lessons—but never mind."

"We *will* have lessons, if it will help you—if it will do you any good. I shall be so glad, so pleased; it will be so nice."

"Really, do you mean it?"

"Indeed I do. We will begin to-morrow; we will begin now."

However, she found that her pupil-elect was not sufficiently advanced to converse in that language; it would be necessary to commence at an earlier stage. Meanwhile, here was the boat to unfasten, the oars to get out."

"Sit there, Carry—in the middle. Take this oar—not like that!—look—so. Now wait. Remember what I told you before,—you must try to 'feather' to-day. Off we go!"

He pushed off, taking one oar, while Caroline had the other. She was a quick little thing, and rapidly improved under the slight tuition he afforded her every now and then. Only, her strength being of course inferior to his, the exertion of all her power could not prevent the boat from progressing in a very one-sided fashion.

"This is very stupid," he observed, at last; "it will never do to go on in this way. Can't you pull out any better?"

"Indeed, no!" as she paused, panting and heated, and her hands feeling very sore. "Don't you think, Vaughan, if *you* didn't pull so hard, we should keep more even, perhaps?"

"But, as it is, I'm not putting out my strength, and then, you see, it's no exercise for me at all. What I want is to practise. Our fellows are going to have a match next term, and I'm stroke oar. Go on again, Carry; see what you can do."

She tried with all the strength of her arms, and the far greater strength of her will, to do what he desired: for a little while they got on pretty well, but finally the physical power failed, the oar

dropped with great splashes into the water, and the boat began spinning round again.

"I can't do it," she piteously exclaimed, looking round at Vaughan. "I'd rather sit by the rudder, and see you row, for a little while."

"Oh, I daresay," he began, laughing; but even while he laughed, her face grew so pale, her head began to droop so strangely, that he was rather alarmed. "Here, Carry, dear, give me the oar. Look here; you shall lie at the bottom of the boat quite comfortable."

In a minute or two she looked up, gave a sobbing sort of sigh, and submitted with docile readiness to all his arrangements. He pulled off his coat to make a pillow for her head, declaring he should be warm enough with rowing. How did she feel? Was she comfortable? Was she sure she liked lying there?

Caroline smiled assent, and smiled again cheerfully up at his serious and even anxious face. She thought to herself how kind he was to be sorry; and she rather liked feeling weak and dizzy for a little while, to be so cared for, and to be looked at as

he was looking at her now. Illness was too strange to her to be formidable; and the transient exhaustion was, after all, more singular than painful to the strong, healthful girl. She lay quiet in the bottom of the boat, her straw hat slung over her arm, her head resting on Vaughan's coat, her eyes alternately watching the soft clouds floating over the limpid sky, and seeking the face and answering the looks of her companion. So he rowed gently along the lake for some time in silence.

"Oh, how pleasant this is!" she said at last; "how softly we go along! and how sunshiny everything looks!"

"Are you better, then? Yes; I see a little colour coming back. I declare, Carry, you quite frightened me—you went so white all at once."

"Did I? I felt sick; that was it, I suppose."

"Yes; no doubt that was it."

He rowed on with somewhat more vigour. Another pause in the conversation. But this time Vaughan filled it up by whistling. Caroline began to feel a little ashamed of her lazy position; she moved restlessly.

"You had better lie still, I think, till we land," observed Vaughan, in a grave, advising tone. "You might begin to feel sick again, you know."

"But your coat—don't you want your coat?"

"Oh, I can do without it very well. Keep quiet—that's the best thing you can do."

So she tried to attain this ultimate perfection, and neither moved nor spoke till they were at the landing-place. Vaughan jumped out, drew in the boat, fastened it, and then assisted her to disembark.

She required very little assistance; she felt quite herself again, and assured him so. They walked homeward, through the lane with beech-trees on each side, just budding out into the tender green, which looks more like coloured light than absolute colour. At the steep bank where the primroses were, Caroline looked up wistfully as she passed.

"Do you feel all right?" Vaughan asked her, as they came in sight of the house. And hardly waiting for her quick affirmative, he went on—"I wonder what made you ill. It was queer—all on a sudden."

"Yes," said Caroline, searching in her own mind for any other cause than the real one.

"Very likely it was the boat spinning round," he suggested; "that was it; don't you think so?"

"Perhaps it was," she said, gladly.

"You did not look pale till then," he went on; "and the boat spun tremendously, didn't it? Poor Carry!"

He laughed, and so did she. Very gaily they thus re-entered the house.

Chapter ii.

Redwood looked especially pleasant on summer afternoons. Mr Hesketh, seated in his chair under the great cedar-tree on the south lawn, thought so, at least. There was the quaint, red-brick mansion straight before his eyes, the terrace walk, and the long, modern sash windows of the breakfast-room, opening on to it. At the side, a broad level lawn again, with flower-beds here and there, and a sun-dial in the midst. Shrubberies, at all times rich and sedate with evergreens, luscious and brilliant in their seasons with lilac, syringa, and sweet-briar, rhododendron, and red English roses. Beyond them were meadows sloping gently downward to the thin streamlet that flowed through the park till it reached the large piece of water they ambitiously called the lake. Dark mysterious woods belted in the prospect. "So far shalt thou see, and no

farther," they seemed to say; and Caroline liked to imagine to herself a wonderful new world lying beyond that black shadow. She had been through it often enough; but when her eyes no longer looked on the actual beyond, she chose to disbelieve it, and went back to her own creations. That abrupt hill, especially, crowned with a pine wood, looked like the very edge of the world;—and the girl's eyes turned wistfully towards it many times in a day, with that constant longing for something in the future—some unattained newness, which is one of youth's irritating pleasures, sweet pains, which you will. She had lived at Redwood all these years, and had never yet ascended Crooksforth Hill. So she was saying to Mr Hesketh on this very afternoon, as she stood near him, leaning against the slender stem of a young silver birch, and twisting in her fingers a spray of roses gathered from the tree that overspread the southern wall of the house—rich, burning, passionate, red buds, like drops of sunfire.

Caroline, as a girl of sixteen, was equally picturesque and poetical to behold. There was a wild,

half Indian grace in her lithe, elastic movements; a flush of exquisite colour in the deep-toned gold of her hair, and the warm roses that for ever glowed on her cheek. Her features were fine, rather than pretty, with a certain strength in their outline which is not always so pleasant in a woman's face as it promised to be in hers. But when the spirit within her chose it, those grey eyes could soften into tenderness, that firmly-cut mouth could relax into a sweetness perfectly womanly, and entirely bewitching. Even now, in her early girlhood, these changes of expression were often perceptible; but as yet she was thoroughly girlish, with all a girl's eager susceptibility to impressions—quick, fast-succeeding feelings, and unanalysed sensations. In such a nature, reverie takes the place of thought; and indeed Caroline, while very prone to dream, to imagine, and to lose herself in the maze of her own wild fancies, was too little used to reflect. Moreover, she was seldom retrospective in her own mind. She talked of the past quite as frequently as she thought about it. As for the future, it is the special inheritance of youth,

and Caroline had taken possession long ago, and held it triumphantly, after the manner of an autocrat. As she stands now, twisting the rose-spray between her long, thin fingers, you may be very sure she is far enough away from Crooksforth Hill, the name which has just left her lips.

"But, my dear," observes Mr Hesketh, responsive to the remark she had made to him, "you could go any day, you know. Stokes would drive you to the foot of the hill, and you might walk up to the top, or you could ride on your pony."

"Yes, I might," said Caroline, and went back to her empire straightway.

"There is a beautiful view from the top," went on the old man. "On clear days you can see the sea quite distinctly; and the moorlands are very fine on the other side. But it is many years since I was there. Vaughan went once, but it was a misty day, and he was disappointed. When he comes home, he must take you there. That will be the best plan."

"Ah, he will be here in a week now!" cried the girl, rising to the surface of things, with a

deep-drawn breath of much pleasure and satisfaction.

After all, she lived thoroughly and keenly in the outside world, at most times. She was a *sentient* being in the fullest degree: her perceptions were exquisitely acute; she responded like a finely-strung harp to every air that passed by, even from the faintest, to the loudest blast that shook the roof-tree.

The bright colours of some flowers in the shrubbery border caught her eye. She flitted across the lawn to gather them, singing in her clear but somewhat peculiar voice a fragment of some remembered French song. She looked very well in her white dress (Mr Hesketh especially liked her to wear white), with her wide-brimmed straw-hat hanging on her arm,—where she more frequently wore it than on her head, and a blue scarf floating about her neck. She danced about with a joyousness that was quite infectious. It was pleasant to watch the elastic spring of the slender feet from the ground, the unconscious grace of the whole figure, the careless, but har-

monious turn of the head, with its bright crown of waved hair.

"She will be beautiful, almost as beautiful as her mother," Mr Hesketh thought to himself, as he looked at her.

Presently she came, with a more sedate step and bearing, and seated herself on the grass at his feet, with her flowers in her lap. He laid his hand fondly on her head, and she turned round with a quick caressing gesture specially her own, and kissed the shrivelled, kind hand.

"You are quite happy here, Caroline, are you not?" he said, after a little while.

She was busy arranging her flowers, but she lifted her head and paused, with the bright damask and delicate pale roses arrested in her fingers.

"Are you not?" he repeated, as she was yet silent.

"Oh, I was stopping to remember—if I could. I was trying to think—to measure *how* happy I am!"

"Is it truly so, my dear child?" said the old man, moved beyond his wont. "Are you satisfied? Do you wish for nothing?"

"Yes—yes! Indeed, I wish for many things," she began, quickly, but added, with more deliberation, "I don't think I could be happy with nothing to wish for. It is so pleasant wishing, and hoping, and expecting ——"

"If you are never disappointed, never thwarted," Mr Hesketh put in, half sadly, half cynically, but in all tenderness to his companion. "I suppose *that* is essential to the pleasure; is it not, my little Lina?"

"I am not sure. Ah, you are laughing, but it is true. If one did not half fear disappointment, expectation would not be so keen, so earnest, and would not fill up one's life so much—don't you see. It is very miserable to be disappointed, of course," she allowed, gravely, "but I daresay it is right, and does people good."

"You think so, do you?" muttered the old gentleman, drily. But a glance at her bright, fair face dispelled the momentary shadow that had fallen on his own, and he only smiled and stroked the rich braids of her hair, while she again gave her attention to her flowers.

"Do you like 'expecting' people as well as events?" was his next question, cautiously compiled, but put with an air of entire carelessness.

"Ah—yes. I like expecting Vaughan," she replied, promptly. "It makes the weeks before quite rosy, and the two or three days before *the* day, oh, so bright!"

"Indeed. But you and Vaughan agree marvellously well. You suit one another."

"Yes; that is just it," Caroline said, complacently. "Oh, isn't that rose exquisite?"—in a sudden little enthusiastic parenthesis. "Yes, I do like Vaughan—I *like* him. I like his face, and his way of walking and moving, and his behaviour to people, and his talking, and his fun, and his cleverness, and everything about him. I think he is just what a man ought to be; don't you?"

"He is a fine lad; and when once he is well settled into manhood, I make no doubt of his being everything one can wish."

"Isn't he now, then?"

This direct question, and still more the simple,

wondering gaze which accompanied it, somewhat embarrassed Mr Hesketh.

"My dear," he hesitated, "very few young men of his age, indeed, I may say none, are without their faults and follies. Youth is not the season of perfection; no one would wish it—no one should expect it."

"But Vaughan," she persisted—"Vaughan is better and not worse than most young men, isn't he? What has he done wrong? Has he displeased you?"

"My dear child, don't be alarmed," said Mr Hesketh, fairly amused out of his perplexity; "nothing is wrong—nothing is wrong. We shall have him with us in another week," he went on, in a new tone; "and then the piano will have a hard life of it; and the billiard-table and the horses will know also that Mr Vaughan Hesketh is at Redwood."

But Caroline mused, and did not reply. She placed the crimson roses together, the pink roses together, the white roses together; then combined the three bunches in one glorious and glowing

mass. Finally she suffered them to fall, scattered in disorder on her lap again.

"I must practise before he comes," she observed; "my billiard-playing has been shamefully neglected, he will say. But it is so long since I had any one to play with."

"He taught you to play, didn't he? An accomplished preceptor, too," muttered Mr Hesketh, with a dry smile, to himself.

"Yes, indeed, he is very clever at all those kinds of things," said Caroline, colouring; "there is no harm in that, is there?"

"Surely not, my dear, other pursuits not being neglected at the same time. And in return for his lessons you taught him French?"

"Yes. He got on capitally; he speaks French as well as I do."

"You modest little appraiser! But he ought to do no less, after all the pains you took with him."

"Pains! Oh, it was very pleasant. I liked teaching, and he liked learning."

She gathered her flowers together again, and slowly rose to her feet.

"You will be seventeen next month," said Mr Hesketh, after a pause of consideration. "What do you say, Caroline, to the idea of a ball on your birth-day?"

"Oh!" Her eyes sparkled, the pensive curve of her lips relaxed into the gayest smile. "Do you really mean it, uncle?"

"I do, really. Well, I think I see what you would say to it. You approve?"

"I should think so. And so will Vaughan, I am sure; are not you?"

Half doubtfully, though, she sought his face.

"We will ask him. If he doesn't like it, he may lock himself in his room while the event takes place; for we'll have a ball, Caroline. You shall write the invitations to-morrow."

"Oh!" she cried again, in ecstasy, unable to say more. Yet the next thought rose to her lips, "I hope Vaughan will like it," clouding the perfect sunshine.

"Pshaw!" cried Mr Hesketh, laughing half impatiently; "he isn't so foolish as not to like it. And be that as it may, we'll settle the prelimina-

ries to-morrow; and you shall tell Mrs Brownlow what menaces her; break it to her by degrees, that she will have to take up the dining-room carpet, decorate the walls, wax the floor, and provide supper for sixty people at least."

"Poor Mrs Brownlow!" said Caroline, spinning round on the grass, in uncontrollable glee.

"And above and beyond all, oh female vanity," went on the old gentleman, "you shall choose a dress for the occasion. What shall it be? Gossamer and spangles? Pink satin and gold lace? Or the costume of a heroine—simple white muslin, with one rose in your hair?"

"Neither—neither!" she cried, with a ringing laugh. "I will frighten you, it shall be so gorgeous; and I will ruin you, it shall cost so much! I will dream of it all to-night, and tell you what it is to be in the morning."

She ran off, again singing as she ran, to pluck some sprays from a great myrtle bush that grew under the window of the room that was always called Vaughan's room.

* * * * *

It was absolutely real, as Caroline said many times during the next two days; and there was to be a ball at Redwood on the fifteenth of August. The invitations were sent out to the select circle of acquaintances in the village, and to the scattered far-apart "county families" with whom hitherto Mr Hesketh had held but little intercourse. The day after the garden discussion they drove to Durnford, the important little market town, three miles off, and obtained a supply of invitation forms. And that evening Caroline made out a list of guests, and began to fill up the notes and address the envelopes, with a demure and business-like gravity, which only now and then gave place to a carolling forth of some favourite tune; while, if she had occasion to move across the room, her sober demeanour inevitably relaxed, and she waltzed round to the desired point.

"Seventeen notes written and addressed! This is getting on," she observed, arranging them in a little pile by the side of her desk.

"You must be quite fatigued," said the amused

Mr Hesketh, compassionately; "it is a pity that Miss Kendal is not here to help you."

Miss Kendal had been Caroline's governess till a year before. Somehow, the young lady never heard her name, without a sensitive flush and quiver coming to her face. It was a strange truth that, during the last few months of her pupilage, Caroline, until then so fond of Miss Kendal, had apparently felt less cordially towards her. This truth Mr Hesketh suspected without knowing. He observed now the deepened colour on the girl's cheek. She kept silence.

"By the way, have you heard from her lately?" he inquired. "You correspond, do you not?"

"Yes—no. I mean, she writes sometimes, but she has not written lately."

"Who wrote last—Miss Kendal or yourself?"

"She wrote last," said Caroline, colouring again, but looking straightly into her questioner's face, as it was her way to do when speaking the truth was not quite pleasant to her.

"How was that, my dear? Don't you intend writing to her again?"

"I would rather not," she said, with great frankness.

"Indeed. Why so?"

"It seems foolish," she began, apparently finding some difficulty in choosing her words; "that is, I don't think there is much use in writing regularly to—to any one who has little sympathy with—with one's-self."

"And that is Miss Kendal's case? She has no sympathy with you, is that it? She is a good deal older, and it may be difficult for a woman of past thirty to sympathise in the feelings and thoughts, the likes and dislikes, of a girl of sixteen."

Caroline did not reply; she was meditative, on a sudden.

"You did not 'suit' one another, to use your favourite expression," proceeded Mr Hesketh; "wasn't it so, Carry?"

"I suppose so, uncle," she responded, gravely.

"And yet Elizabeth Kendal is an excellent woman ——"

"Oh, sir, I was going to say so," Caroline cried, eagerly; "she is good, kind, noble. I can't tell

you how much I used to admire and respect her—for many things."

"A very qualified and cautious summing up of your sentiments. I think Vaughan must have inoculated you with some of his barrister's prudence—eh, Caroline?"

She looked up; her eyes filled, her lip quivered.

It was evident this was a subject which, for some reason or another, struck more than ordinarily deep into a sensitive part of her nature. Mr Hesketh was content to leave it. He had not much leaning towards the science of investigation, and he thought the entrance of the servant with letters was very timely.

"One from Vaughan," he announced, setting aside the others; "now we shall have the day fixed for his return;" and he read aloud the letter:—

"Temple, July 30.

"DEAR UNCLE,—I had intended being with you at the end of this week, but my friend George Farquhar (the rising young barrister you have heard of) insists on my staying with him a few days, before proceeding to Redwood. I know you will not ob-

ject to the delay, under the circumstances. Moreover, I wish to ask your permission to bring him with me when I come. I should much like you to know him; he is a capital fellow. I write to catch the post; have only time to send love to Caroline.—Your affectionate,

VAUGHAN HESKETH."

There was a silence while Mr Hesketh refolded the note. Caroline's face was perfectly eloquent of disappointment, as her companion saw with a momentary glance.

"Well, he'll be here in time for the ball, at any rate," said he; "and I shall be glad to see his friend Farquhar. I knew his father, and he himself is well worth knowing. Besides, he will be a welcome addition to our rather scanty stock of cavaliers, won't he, Caroline?"

There was a pause.

"I think his friend is very selfish," she then pronounced, warmly, "to insist on Vaughan staying with him just when he was coming home. He could have chosen some other time. He might be sure Vaughan wants to see us, after being away nearly a year."

"My dear child ——" began Mr Hesketh, with

a slight smile. But something made him stop, and his smile grew more melancholy than cynical. "You remember," he added, "it is only two days since you said disappointment was right and proper, and did people good."

Another pause, during which Caroline pulled the feathers from her pen, scrap by scrap, and flung them on the air. She was annoyed, grieved, pained, more than she would confess; but the strong, healthy young spirit righted itself very soon.

"Well," she said presently, half laughing, "I suppose I am being done good to; but it isn't very pleasant; I don't like it, uncle. I am not a stoic after all, I'm afraid."

"Promise never to be either stoic or sophist, and I'll forgive you all your sins against grammar," the old gentleman replied, drawing her towards him, and kissing the frank, sweet face. "I'm afraid poor Miss Kendal, in her devotion to Lindley Murray, must have had a hard time with her rebellious pupil."

"Poor Miss Kendal!" echoed Caroline, with a brief sigh, and then turned to her invitation notes again.

Chapter iii.

Mr Hesketh's remark, that Vaughan "would be at Redwood in time for the ball," proved literally prophetic. The morning of the fifteenth of August dawned, cloudy and threatening rain, and Vaughan and his friend were only expected to arrive in the afternoon. The day proved rainy, one of the most dismal of wet summer days, with a chill and dampness in the air, and the trees looking forlorn and spiritless.

Caroline had plenty to do; she went about the house from early morning, either completing preparations in one room, or admiring them in another, or altering them somewhere else. Besides, as flowers were to form the decorations, there was necessarily much left to be done on the last day. The gardener brought in huge bunches of his most gorgeous dahlias, and other floral magnificence.

Festoons of ivy, with glowing groups of flowers inserted here and there, were arranged on the walls of the dancing-room, and long wreaths of roses and myrtle reached from each corner of the room to the central chandelier. The wax-lights rose, slender and snowy, from luxurious nests of soft, rich colour —geranium, and verbena, and heliotrope, artfully inserted into small dishes of water among the glass facets of the chandeliers. It all looked very pretty, Caroline thought, as she gave the finishing touch to the great wreath of cedar and oak, which she had arranged round Mr Hesketh's picture over the mantelpiece. And with a look of mutual congratulation, she and Mrs Brownlow, the housekeeper, who was serious and solemn with a sense of heavy responsibility, left the room. Then there were the drawing-room bouquets to arrange, books and prints to fetch from the library, the supper table to inspect, the decorations in the hall, executed conjointly by the gardener and Stokes, the tall groom, to duly admire. Finally, she led Mr Hesketh through the rooms, was satisfied with his warm appreciation of all the arrangements, and

then gave him his tea in the study, chattering busily all the while.

"We shall have just enough people to fill the room without crowding it," she observed; "thirty-five ladies and twenty-nine gentlemen. An admirable proportion, isn't it?"

"Is that counting Vaughan and his friend?"

"No; I forgot them—at least, I did not count them. But there will be plenty of *cavalieri*, after all your ill-natured doubts on that point. You see, sir, I feel quite proud of living in a neighbourhood that can furnish a ball-room so well."

"Do you intend to enjoy yourself very much this evening?"

"Indeed I do," she replied, with great emphasis. "I have been looking forward to it for nearly three weeks."

"Does it look more radiant now that you are close to it?"

"I don't know; I haven't stopped to think; I have been too busy. Of course it does, though; it must. A ball—a real ball! I never was at a real ball in all my life."

"In *all* your life!" repeated Mr Hesketh, with his old, amused, affectionate smile at her. "What a long waste of existence to look back upon. Hark! was that the gate-bell? Is it time for them to be here?"

"Not yet," said Caroline, composedly. But the flush came into her cheek, and her hand shook as she gave him his second cup of tea. However, it proved to be no arrival, and Caroline went on talking, while the old gentleman sipped his tea, and listened, in a very genial frame of mind. Nevertheless, he looked grave when he noticed, by the sudden brightening of the western sky, that it was sunset.

"They must have missed the train," he said. "It is really inexcusable of Vaughan, to leave it so late, and on your birth-day, too."

He muttered the last words displeasedly, as to himself. But his companion heard them.

"Oh, they will be here in time to dress, and nothing else signifies," said Caroline, carelessly. She rose from her seat and walked to the window. "Only see how the day has relented, now it is

going away," she cried; "it is the clearest, softest evening. I think I will run out on the terrace for half-an-hour before dressing."

"Do so, my dear. I fancy you look tired with being in-doors all day; and I want my little Lina to look blooming this evening."

"You are very good to your little Lina, always," cried she, with sudden earnestness. "You *think* about her so much. I wish I deserved ——"

But even while Mr Hesketh looked round, surprised and touched by the tone and manner with which she spoke, she slipped from the room. And presently he saw her, wrapped in a mantle, and with a hood about her head, walking rapidly to and fro on the terrace. There she was finishing in full the abrupt sentence she had commenced in the room.

"Yes, I wish I deserved what I have, and I wish I had more of that which I *do* deserve. Why is it, I wonder, that these kind of things are so unequal? I behaved absolutely ill to Miss Kendal, yet she loved me; I slighted her, but she was careful and thoughtful over me. And my uncle, how tender

and kind he is to me. Why don't I love him better than anything in the world, I wonder? I owe him most; he loves me more than any one else loves me ——"

At this point a burst of tears—grieved, pained, proud tears—came, and would have their way. It was a remarkable instance of the utter vanity and impotence of circumstance over happiness. Caroline, on her birth-day, within two hours of the long-looked-for bliss of her first ball, leaned against the large silver birch at the end of the terrace walk, and indulged in a hearty fit of crying. In the midst of it, the outer bell sounded again; she fancied she heard carriage-wheels, and she fled into the house, through side corridors, and up the back staircase, and shut herself in her own little dressing-room.

There she sat, quiet and unmolested, for half-an-hour, till the tears were well dried, and the trouble subsided. She began to wonder if the expected arrival had taken place. She consulted her watch; it was late, time for her to begin to dress. She looked at the beautiful dress, Mr Hesketh's birthday gift to her, which lay already spread out

on the sofa. She was too much of a girl not to take pleasure even then, in regarding the delicate white lace of the robe, the tasteful fashion in which it was made, and the completeness of all the appointments, from the embroidered satin shoes to the exquisite fan of snowy feathers and mother-of-pearl. Also, it gave her comfort, regarding all these as visible signs of the thoughtful love and indulgent kindness that *one*, at least, had for her.

She was musing thus, standing draped in a long, white dressing-gown, with her beautiful hair tossed about her shoulders, when a quick footstep along the corridor made her heart leap. And then came an eager knocking at her door.

"Let me see you for a minute, Carry. Mayn't I come in?"

She went to the door and opened it. She had an idea of looking very cool and indifferent, and certainly her figure grew erect in an involuntary stateliness, as she stood facing him. But the first glance at the familiar face overset everything. He looked so eager, so earnest, and his eyes lit up as they met hers with such an expression of pleasure,

and surprise, and admiration. He took both her hands and kissed her.

"Carry, you have grown!"

"I have had time to grow since you saw me," she said, with the least bit of reproachfulness in her tone, and the quivering, smiling glance that went with it. But look, and tone, and gesture, were all loving; there was not the smallest attempt at dignified reticence. Caroline had no talent for little or great hypocrisies; as she felt, she looked. All the pride and indignation had gone out from her; she was simply and solely happy, now that he was before her, holding her hands, and looking down on her with the old look, the dearest and pleasantest to her in the world.

He released one hand, to draw from his pocket a morocco case of ominous appearance.

"What do you think it is? What should you like best?"

"I shall like anything."

"But I don't want you to be so easily pleased. I ransacked half the shops in London, before I found what contented *me* for your birth-day present."

"Dear Vaughan! How kind—how good of you!"

He opened the case, and drew therefrom a bracelet of pearls. He clasped it on the round arm, from which he turned up the long hanging sleeve.

"How pretty it looks! Do you like it?"

"Like it? Oh, I am so pleased."

She was, indeed. The flutter of happiness was almost painful, it was so exquisite for the minute. He had been thinking of her; she had wronged him. How delicious it was to hate herself for having been unjust to him!

Yet another look was exchanged, an uplift one from her, eloquent of gladness, and of frank affection; while he gazed down at the sweet, girlish face, with a smile, the full meaning of which it might not be quite easy to interpret. He pressed one more kiss on the rosy cheek, murmuring "birth-day wishes" to her as he did so.

"For, you know," said he, "when we next meet, it will be in state. Oh, Carry, how came you to have a ball? A quiet evening would have been bliss. I'm wearied out with gaieties."

"Redwood will be quiet again after to-night," said she, apologetically, "and when once the ball begins you won't mind it, will you?"

"I can't say. No—not even your smiling shall win me to like it."

But he answered her radiant smile with a glance that was neither one of discontent nor disapproval. Then he let go her hand, and she closed the door, and ran in to dress, as quickly as she could, while looking ever and anon at her bracelet, and trembling with happiness, real, present, tangible, and recognisable, such as seldom comes within the experience of human beings after they have passed the rubicon of childhood. How is it that the instinctive comment on such a state of beatification is always compassionate?

Poor Caroline, how happy she was! The handmaiden who waited upon her came to assist her in dressing, bringing with her the dainty bouquet for which the gardener had reserved his choicest flowers. That was pleasant. She laid her flowers, and her pearls, and her pretty fan on the table, that she might look at them while Rachel brushed her

hair. Sometimes, too, she looked for a moment at the reflection in the long glass before her, for *that* was very pretty to see, likewise:—the white-stoled figure, with the abundant golden shower of wavy hair falling to the waist; the arms shining from the full cloudy muslin sleeves of the loose robe, and the face, with such a vivid colour tinting its fairness, such a dewy lustre in the eyes, such a tremulous, dawn-like beauty over it all.

It was a different vision, less picturesque, perhaps, but hardly less attractive, that a little time after descended the wide staircase. Two gentlemen were standing at the foot of the stairs, and looked up, hearing a soft rustling, and being aware of, without seeing, a very snowy presence approaching them. Daintily and deliberately, Mistress Caroline descended, feeling for the minute fully conscious of her lace, and pearls, and gold-embroidered slippers. At the last stair she paused. Vaughan held out his hand, as if to lead her into the room by the door of which they were standing. But before passing in, an introduction was to take place.

"Caroline, let me introduce my friend Mr Farquhar," he said, with some *empressement.*

Caroline saw a brown, intelligent face, and a pair of dark eyes bent very earnestly on her, as they exchanged bows. She had only time further to remark, that the figure was somewhat undersized for a man, or at least, it looked so to her, leaning on the arm of Vaughan, whose stature was of the tallest. Then they all went in to Mr Hesketh's study, where the old gentleman awaited them.

"Well, Lina, the truant has found his way home at last, you see. Ah! Mr Farquhar, we shall make you pay by a long sojourn at Redwood, for the time you have kept this boy from us."

"Do you always punish sinners after that fashion, sir?" said the gentleman addressed; "because, if so, dishonesty is the best policy, and I shall give up being virtuous."

"I am glad the renunciation is in your power," said Mr Hesketh, laughing; at which Vaughan and his friend exchanged a rapid glance, and both the young men smiled slightly. A very faint smile, but a very disagreeable one, Caroline thought, and

she instantly decided, with the usual deliberate judgment of seventeen, that Mr Farquhar was a most unpleasant character.

"George has heard a great deal about Redwood," said Vaughan, rather hastily; "he is all anxiety to make personal acquaintance with its attractions. Aren't you, old fellow?"

"I *was*," the old fellow replied, looking up from his coffee cup, with an instant's glance at Mr Hesketh and Miss Maturin. Then he turned to the latter, with the bending air of deference, the softened voice, which a gentleman naturally and becomingly assumes when he speaks to a lady, "You have a beautiful country around you, I believe!"

"It is considered so," she replied, with embarrassed politeness.

She was too much of a child to be at all expert in that art of cold courtesy which drops sentences like icicles, as chilly, as smooth, and as pretty-seeming. For Caroline to be cold and repellant, was to be very much *not* at her ease. However, Mr Farquhar seemed un-repelled. He proceeded:—

"You must be very fond of such a pretty place?"

"Redwood? It is my home,"—with a flush of warmth.

"Ah, and the rest follows, as a matter of course," he said, half-questioning, half-asserting, and looking at her with a sort of amused interest and admiring curiosity. "I suppose you cannot conceive the possibility of having a home, and *not* being very fond of it?"

"I know it is possible. I know it is the case often," she returned, coldly, again. "People are either very much to be pitied or blamed who are in such a position, I think."

"Do *you* pity or blame them most?"

"I cannot possibly do either, till I know the circumstances," she said, with a judicial gravity at which he found it impossible to restrain a smile.

She detected it. Mr Farquhar's smiles were peculiarly obnoxious to her, it would seem: at this one she turned away with a degree of dignity that ought to have been absolutely awful to any but a very hardened and misguided young man.

But the guests began to arrive, and Miss Maturin

and the three gentlemen went into the ball-room. The melancholy-looking persons who attended in the capacity of musicians struck up a lively strain, in direct and grotesque contrast to their lugubrious faces and air of resigned depression. The room began to glow with colour; brilliant dresses and laughing faces reflected back the light; the flower-fragrant air grew warm, and the buzz and hum of many voices sounded with a vague sense of festivity, Caroline thought.

Caroline forgot Mr Farquhar; everything that was unpleasing to her faded away at once. She had all her acquaintance to greet; they were all acquaintances; she had formed few intimacies, no friendships. This arose partly from circumstances, but far more from her disposition, which, while it led her to feel kindly to all, allowed her to entertain love for very few. And we know that the friendship of a young girl of any depth of nature scouts the idea of degree; it must be superlative, or it is nothing. Caroline did not see in Bessy Windleton, pretty little sylph as she was, or in either of the two accomplished, handsome daughters

of Sir John and Lady Bracebridge, that ideal perfection which she could fairly and fully adore, or that community of feeling in which she could repose, *ergo*, she was to them Miss Maturin, and no more. If the enthusiasm of youth gives us something, it also loses us a great deal. Older people are apt to talk with regret of the generosity, the confiding faith of early years. Is it not somewhat hollow, this generosity that is so thoughtless? is it not spurious and not to be relied on, this faith which only holds its existence by virtue of its blindness? After all, is not a kind of passionate eclecticism one of the most salient characteristics of a young mind of any force or originality? True, its ideals are angels, let them fall ever so short of perfection; but then, the rest of the world are nullities, no matter how good, how true, how noble, they may really be. Youth bears with it its own crown, its own divine atmosphere of light and fragrance, its own armour of hope and illimitable and dauntless ambition. Its good gifts suffice it, without taking from those which belong to another period of existence. The wide charity which

believes none are all evil, and can bear to find that none are all good; the strong faith which can survive the knowledge of the shortcomings of its ideal, the clear-seeing love which can triumph over all the phases of idolatry—steadfast, enduring love, one day of which were worth a cycle of blind adoration—such is the abiding faith, the catholic generosity, which rarely enters into the composition of early youth. We are too proud when we are young, too haughty and uncompromising in our loves and our ambitions. Afterwards we grow humbler, and are content to love even what we know to be imperfection, and to aim at—what God wills, whether high or lowly in our own sight. It was not a *young* man who wrote,

"They also serve who only stand and wait;"

and humility and patience are not young virtues; they grow out of knowledge, and walk hand-in-hand with faith. To all this we may come in time, —thank God, who gives a special heritage to every time of life. Childhood, youth, maturity, decline, each hath its dower; and no man needs to look back with yearning or regret to what *has been*,

when he may open his eyes and see, stretch out his hands and receive, the good that *is*.

There was no looking back, no looking forward even, and still less any regret, in Caroline's mind that evening. Keenly, fully, she enjoyed the present. Her ordinary life was too quiet and secluded for her not to overrate the attractions of society when they came in her way. Her love of variety, her appreciation of whatever was tasteful, brilliant, and graceful, were in some measure gratified by the well-lighted, decorated rooms, and the troops of smiling, soft-spoken, gently-gliding guests that peopled them. Caroline did not require much more to delight her. Vaughan came and sat beside her, and talked to her at every opportunity ; she danced as often as she chose ; Mr Hesketh was happily established over a rubber of whist in his study : what more had she to wish for?

"What a number of strange faces!" was one of Vaughan's first exclamations, as he looked round the room, wherein, at present, a select portion of the guests were writhing by couples, in all the spasmodic contortions of that triumph of modern

inventions, the graceful *valse à deux tems.* "I had no idea we knew so many people. Quite a numerous assemblage."

"Isn't it?" she rejoined, exultantly. "Nice-looking people, too, are they not, Vaughan?"

"Well, I can't say much for the gentlemen, Carry—white cravats with human appendages to them, for the most part. Just now, they look remarkably like cock-chafers spinning on pins, but, perhaps, you never saw that cruel schoolboy operation? You may see a highly graphic illustration of it in that long young officer who is waltzing with Miss Windleton."

"You must not laugh at my guests. Do you see that gentleman standing by the door? That is Mr Bracebridge, Sir John's only son, just returned from travelling in the East. Don't you think him picturesque-looking?"

"Picturesque? Yes, I suppose so. Pictures are of various kinds. Do you admire *that* style of picture?"

"I do," she returned, looking up with her candid eyes; "he looks pleasant, good, intelligent. And I believe he is so."

"Do you——Innocence?" He laughed, as he returned her look. "Well, I know nothing about him; but, as a general rule, I hate fellows with eccentric beards and *outré* style; a sure sign of a coxcomb, take my word for it."

As he spoke, the gentleman they were discussing navigated his course with some difficulty through the dancers, and came up to them. His mission was to ask Miss Maturin to dance the next quadrille, and she had half bowed her head in acquiescence, when Vaughan interfered.

"Caroline, do you forget you promised it to me?"

She looked at him, wondering and perplexed. Mr Bracebridge still stood in the attitude of appeal, but with ready courtesy smoothed away the embarrassment at once.

"The next following, then, may I hope for?"

"If you please," cried Caroline, artlessly enough showing her own pleasure. The gentleman with the beard then moved away, and Caroline looked up to Vaughan inquiringly.

"You did not ask me to dance," she said, gravely;

"why did you say I had promised? I did not even know you intended to dance at all."

"Well, I intended to ask you, and I knew if I had, you would have agreed. Besides, I did not want our conversation interrupted by that stupid, broad-shouldered animal."

But Caroline did not smile. She examined her bouquet with some seriousness.

"You don't mean to say you are disappointed? Shall I call him back, and resign my claim in his favour? You look as if I had deprived you of a pleasure. You know, Caroline, I wouldn't do that for the world."

She could not help laughing at his mock-heroic look and tone. Besides, by this time, she had explained and refined away by various involuntary sophistries, that which at first had struck her healthy sensitiveness as "not quite right." She was glad to turn to some other subject of conversation.

"You have not told me anything about yourself. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Oh, far too much to be discussed in a ball-room. Studying law, Carry. Think of it! If we

talked about it, the candles would go out. You shall see some of the books I've brought with me to read."

"But you were not studying law at Mr Farquhar's?"

"No; I was enjoying a respite therefrom. Caroline, what a pretty girl Bessy Windleton has grown. They are forming the quadrille. Let us go and choose a *vis-a-vis*."

So they went, and there followed an interval of dancing and fragmental conversation. Then Vaughan left her, to go to Miss Windleton. Caroline was amused to watch him: the half tender politeness of his manner, the polished air with which he conversed, so different from the terse, boyish style, which it seemed natural for him to assume in talking to her, his old playmate. As she thus watched them, a voice, a very mellow and pleasantly-modulated voice, sounded just at her shoulder.

"This is 'home' in a new phase, is it not, Miss Maturin?"

It was Mr Farquhar. He was leaning on the arm of the sofa on which she sat, and when she

turned to him, his dark face took a curious expression of pleasure and interest.

"We have never had a ball at Redwood before."

"Would you like to have it again—often ?"

She considered. "I think not—not too often, at least. I suppose it would lose its zest."

"Have you had much experience of such gaieties ?"

"This is my first ball."

"I am afraid you will never like another so much as this, the first. That is rather a discouraging philosophy, you think."

"No ; there are plenty of pleasures in the world to have for the first time."

"And variety is charming. Down with old things, let us perpetually be having something new!" Mr Farquhar cried, with energetic irony.

"I don't mean that," said Caroline, courageously looking up at him ; "pleasure is not all, not the only thing in people's lives. And things that are the best worth having, never grow old."

"You think not ?"

"Do not you ?"

He paused, then said, suddenly—"What are the things best worth having?"

But Caroline found herself in a difficulty, and did not answer immediately.

"Won't you tell me? Perhaps you think I ought to know for myself."

"I suppose you do know. Most people are aware what it is that they most prize and care for."

"But the question is what is *best*, not what is dearest."

"People ought to love dearest what is best," pronounced the legislator of seventeen.

"That ends the question," said Mr Farquhar, laughing.

Caroline felt her old displeasure revive when he laughed. But he looked serious and earnest enough when he again spoke.

"I suppose, in your estimation, *home* is one of the things best worth having—one of the things that never grow old?"

"Yes; it never grows old. One would never tire of *that*."

A happy thing, indeed, for those who have a

home. But for *nous autres* who have not, is not our case a pitiable one?"

"But you have a home, for Vaughan has been staying with you there," cried Caroline, quickly.

"I have a house," said Mr Farquhar, with a peculiar expression at the mention of Vaughan's name; "and I have what is called 'chambers' in London. But neither of these is what you mean by home; I never had that. Are you sorry for me?"

"Very sorry," said Caroline, expressing, because she felt, much cordiality as she spoke.

"You, who are so rich in 'things worth having' —love and care, friends, all that makes a home dear and beautiful—should have very great indulgence for your poorer brethren," Mr Farquhar went on; "and must not quarrel with them, if they do not always 'love dearest what is best.' Happy people are apt to be great tyrants; don't be a tyrant, Miss Maturin."

She was puzzled to make out his meaning, and she was about to ask him, when Mr Bracebridge approached to claim her for the next dance.

There were no more philosophical conversations that evening. The festivities waxed gayer and gayer up to the climax of supper. Caroline, besides her position as hostess, was far too brilliantly attractive in herself not to be constantly engrossed, and her attention fully occupied in succession, now by one, now by another, and not unfrequently by two or three admiring swains at once. Mr Farquhar held aloof under these circumstances. Caroline was afraid he was not enjoying himself much. She occasionally caught glimpses of him standing against a doorway, or examining the prints and books on one of the tables, or leaning by the sofa where they had been talking together, apparently watching the dancers, his peculiar but not unkindly smile curving his mouth. Once Vaughan came up to him, and they exchanged a few remarks. Mr Hesketh also, fresh from his hard-won rubber, and very genial and exhilarated, as whist-players always are in such cases, came into the room, with a word and a smile for everybody, and finally anchored beside the stranger guest.

"Not dancing, Mr Farquhar? I hope you have

at least a dislocated ankle to plead in excuse. In these days, for a young man not to dance is to be a sort of Pariah in society."

The gentleman addressed bowed, as if in humble acceptance of his doom, and presently made some complimentary remark on the brilliancy of the evening.

"I am glad you are entertained," said the old gentleman, taking that fact for granted rather prematurely; "I suppose a festivity of this kind does not often enliven your dry legal studies. I know—I have heard that you are still a most determined and indefatigable student."

"Pray believe all you hear of me that is in that strain," his companion rejoined, with his inscrutable glance from under his dark brows.

"I am glad to believe it," said Mr Hesketh, emphatically; "the capacity of hard work is one which I greatly respect in a man. There is a kind of courage in labour that transcends most bravery."

"Yet it must require more courage to be idle, I fancy," remarked Mr Farquhar; "the reality of

work and its results is a very comfortable *fact*, such as few men's lives could afford to be without."

Mr Hesketh did not reply, but passed on to the subject of Vaughan; his present studies and future career. He was anxious that his nephew and adopted son should make a figure at the bar, where he himself had practised in his earlier manhood, but without much success. He told Mr Farquhar with what satisfaction he heard of Vaughan's intimacy with himself.

"A companion like yourself, persevering and industrious, is precisely what I could have most wished for him. He has talent enough, and energy, too, when he chooses?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Mr Farquhar, warmly, seeing that the words were uttered in a half-questioning tone; "I know few things that Vaughan Hesketh could not do, if he once resolved on doing them."

"Exactly; and he seems to have been setting to work in earnest of late. He tells me he has even brought his law-books down here, intending to study during his holidays."

"Indeed!"

The dancers were promenading round the room just now, and the speaker's eye had fallen, with a very odd glint in it, on the tall figure and handsome face of Vaughan Hesketh, who was bandying all sorts of lively nonsense with pretty Miss Windleton. But the next minute Mr Farquhar's look changed. Miss Maturin passed, and as she went by smiled up brightly at Mr Hesketh; the edge of the smile seemed lightly to touch the face of his companion, and the brown face looked disturbed for an instant, then settled into a pleasanter expression than it had yet worn. The doubtful flicker left the dark eyes, the shade of irony and subdued bitterness went from the thin, expressive lips.

"Your niece looks thoroughly happy. What a pleasant thing to see is happiness!"

Mr Hesketh assented, while his eyes proudly and admiringly followed the retreating figure of Caroline. But Mr Farquhar meditatively fixed his regards on the polished oaken floor, and was silent for awhile. Presently, the host's attention was

claimed, and he moved away to another part of the room. The mysterious, vague, but magical "sensation" which the initiate recognise as portending "supper," was commencing. Vaughan, still with Miss Windleton on his arm, passed his friend with a hasty nod. Then came Caroline, full of her duties as hostess, and busily engaged in "pairing off" all the ladies and gentlemen who had not performed that office for themselves. As she was arranging a last detachment, she perceived Mr Farquhar, looking, as she thought, rather lonely, by the mantelpiece. She hesitated a minute, half blushing, and looking a very sweet picture of girlish shyness.

He came forward, and offered his arm with what seemed only a due amount of courteous eagerness. She accepted it, and they went into the supper-room. Mr Farquhar appeared to revivify under her influence. His face brightened, his very voice changed; the atmosphere of her innocent, happy youth seemed to work a sort of enchantment upon him. Vaughan paused in the midst of his *petits soins* to the fair Bessy Windleton, and looked with amazement at his friend.

He could hear his voice distinct above the loud hum of the roomful of talkers, for George Farquhar's voice was a peculiar one—rich, and clear, and with a certain metallic resonance that seemed to hold its own place even in the midst of numbers. He could see also Caroline's face bent slightly towards her companion, with evident interest in what he was saying. And Vaughan's amazement changed into dissatisfaction, which again increased to displeasure. Miss Windleton wondered what had made him suddenly so *distrait*, and checked the easy flow of those sweet courtesies of which he had been so lavish a little while before. He was unaccountably discontented with the state of things which had seemed to please him well enough until now. Bessy was a pretty little creature; but Caroline was twenty times more distinguished, more *spirituelle*, more interesting as a companion. Why had he been so foolish as to permit all this to fall to the share of any other than himself? What right had Farquhar to monopolise the attention of her who was at once hostess, the heroine of the night, and the most attractive girl in the room? Under the influence

of all these moral and philosophical speculations, Vaughan's brow slightly contracted, and his voice also betrayed some disturbance. He pressed no more cracker bon-bons on his fair companion, forgot the very existence of the sentimental French motto which they had been commenting on only a minute before, and presently, nothing loth, he escorted her into the ball-room, and relinquished her with a smile of exquisite politeness, to an expectant partner there. Then he strode back into the supper-room, now rapidly thinning, and threw himself on a sofa near the table at which Mr Farquhar and Miss Maturin were sitting. The former saw him at once.

"Vaughan," said he, "Miss Maturin and myself are planning a delightful excursion for to-morrow: to go on horseback to the foot of some wonderful hill, which we are to climb, and see a marvellous prospect."

"Indeed! Is it a new arrival in the neighbourhood, Caroline, this wonderful hill? Our humble hills are not accustomed to rejoice in such adjectives."

His friend, with elevated eyebrows, was about to laugh outright at the ill-humoured tone in which he spoke; but Caroline eagerly interposed. Foolish child! she knew well the turn of the lip, the shade in the eye, and what those signs portended. Yet she did not know them well enough to disregard them, it seemed.

"Dear Vaughan!" she cried, "you remember Crooksforth, surely? My uncle told me you went up Crooksforth Hill one day long ago. I have been waiting for your return to go there—it will be so pleasant!"

Well, he seemed to admit it would be pleasant. A smile dawned about his handsome mouth. It grew to full day when Mr Hesketh called on Mr Farquhar to come and see his much-prized Guido, which hung curtained in a recess of the room. Then Vaughan took his vacated seat, nearer to Caroline.

"You look quite radiant," he remarked, with an odd, half-discontented inflection in his voice; "I suppose you have had what young ladies always call 'a most delightful evening?' Haven't you, now?"

"Indeed, yes," she replied, heartily; "and I was thinking," she added, after a brief pause, "that you also liked it. I hoped so."

"One must do at Rome as the Romans do," he answered, carelessly; "it is absurd to stand aloof in the midst of an assemblage of this kind, looking a grave and wise reproach to all the foolery that is going on;—like my friend there. Poor George! I suppose he feels in a ball-room very much as you would feel at a smoking-party."

"Oh, Vaughan! is he that sort of person?"

"You simple child! 'That sort of person' is nothing so very unusual or dreadful, is it? Men are not angels, Carry, and they *will* smoke cigars, and play billiards and écarté, and all sorts of uncelestial things. Your pleasures are not their pleasures; your tastes are widely different from theirs. They care nothing for what makes the glory of life to you. Their hopes, and aims, and wishes, and enjoyments, are utterly opposed to yours. Trust me, you have very little in common with them."

Caroline, in the midst of some dismay, derived

comfort in noticing that he said "them," and not "us." Very wistfully she looked down at her fast-fading flowers.

"But, Vaughan, all the men in the world are not like that?"

"Very nearly all," he said, decidedly. "If you knew as much of the world as I do —— But women never do know anything of life as it really is, happily for them, and for us, too. Where should we come for fresh air, if it were otherwise?" And he smiled down at Caroline the old. pleasant smile.

Bewildered, and rather troubled as she felt, she could not resist the cheering influence of Vaughan's look.

"I am glad I am only a girl," said she, laughing, "in spite of all my old ambitions. Don't you remember, Vaughan, years ago, how I used to chafe over my feminine privations? But it was not because of such delights as you tell me of that I longed for manhood. I had much nobler ideas: chivalry, heroism, romance, were in my mind."

"I know. You were always such a dreamer," he said, with an admiring glance at her animated face.

"Oh, Vaughan, do *you* say it was only a dream to imagine a man might be noble?"

"No—not exactly. But there are different ways of being noble, you know. There are no crusades now, Carry; the age of chivalry is past. What opportunities are there for heroism in the nineteenth century? As for romance, just think of romance in connection with broadcloth and upright hats!"

His jesting tone made her laugh, and with the laugh ended their talk; but not its impression on her simple, implicitly credulous mind. The first blow had been dealt at her faith in goodness; the poisonous sneer at humanity had entered into her ears, and had every chance of fructifying in her heart.

But at present life was stirring around, and demanded attention. The guests were most of them thinking of leaving, and Mr Hesketh's courtly hospitality was manifested, at first in urging their

longer stay, and then in facilitating their departure. The old gentleman passed through the corridor and into the wide hall, with ladies on his arm, his grey head bent deferentially towards them—his whole manner a fine example of the chivalric courtesy of a past generation. Vaughan was idle in comparison, as he leaned on a chair near where Caroline was standing, and bowed or shook hands with a retiring visiter, as occasion suggested.

"How thoroughly my uncle seems in his element," the young man remarked; "so active and busy to the last minute. It is quite admirable to see his unwearied politeness to all these people, going out, too, into this chilly night air, assisting these fair dames into their carriages. Really, Caroline, I begin to repent me of saying the age of chivalry was past."

Caroline was too much occupied with leave-takings to reply. Vaughan's words fell on her ear pleasurably, but the full sense of them escaped her. It was Mr Farquhar who presently suggested to her the danger of Mr Hesketh's hasty transitions

between the hot ball-room and the cold entrance-hall. She was equally touched by his thoughtfulness and her own negligence. She ran out, and was just in time to see the bare grey head bowing adieux to a last carriageful of county beauty and fashion. Eagerly she drew him from the open door, mingling reproaches with compliments to his gallantry, which the old gentleman received with great complacency.

They all four gathered in a group in the deserted ball-room, for a brief, desultory chat, much interspersed by ejaculations of weariness from Vaughan. Then they separated; Mr Farquhar adding to his good-night to Caroline a reminder of the promised excursion for to-morrow.

"Oh, you may rest quite easy, my friend," interposed Vaughan; "*I* won't suffer her to forget."

Mr Hesketh and the two young men watched Caroline trip lightly up the stairs.

"You don't seem much overwhelmed with fatigue," Vaughan cried after her.

"No, indeed!" She turned round at the landing, and waved her hand gaily, with the sunniest

smile in the world.' "I am quite ready to begin the evening all over again."

They all three smiled—very different smiles. Then she disappeared, and so the birth-day *fête* was over.

Chapter iv.

Mr. Hesketh did not appear down-stairs the next morning. He had caught cold, it seemed, and was now paying the penalty for his chivalric politeness of the night before.

So Caroline announced at the breakfast-table, at which she took her usual place only a little after the usual time. It was a lovely morning, after the previous day's rain. The most gracious sunshine was making all things radiant out-of-doors, the softest clouds were wafted gently athwart the sky by a western breeze that just stirred the pine-tops, and caused the silver birch to wave her graceful tresses. All the flowers glowed with redoubled brilliancy of colour; a spirit of cheerfulness seemed abroad.

Caroline looked out on the garden from the low study-window, and smiled to herself delightedly.

"Oh, Vaughan, what a day for Crooksforth! The air is so soft, and the sunshine so pleasant! This sort of day makes me feel as if I could fly!"

"Well, you'll find wings very convenient in mounting Crooksforth," observed Vaughan, who had entered the room with his hand full of letters, just arrived by the morning's post. "Three for my uncle, one for you, George, two for me, and— yes, this one is to Miss Maturin. Carry, surely I know that writing?" He deliberately examined the direction before giving her her letter. "It is, isn't it, from Miss Kendal?"

"Yes," said she, taking it.

She turned away to read it. It was a long letter, apparently, and took more time to peruse than either Vaughan's or his friend's correspondence. The former, having tossed his letters aside, with muttered exclamations at their insipidity, strode to the distant window whither Caroline had betaken herself.

"We're waiting for our coffee," he intimated.

She rose at once, crushed the letter into her pocket, and resumed her place at the urn. Vaughan

seated himself close beside her, and the length of the table almost estranged them from Mr Farquhar, who sat at the further end. Breakfast commenced. Vaughan trifled with his spoon, and made intensely earnest efforts to balance it on the edge of his cup.

"Have you read your letter all through?" at last he said.

"Yes. It is not a long one."

A pause; during which the gentleman rapidly cut slices of ham, and distributed the same to his friend and himself.

"I was not aware you corresponded with Miss Kendal," he resumed, in a low tone. "(Carry, won't you have some ham?) Is it of long standing—the correspondence, I mean?"

"No, thank you. Miss Kendal has written to me several times since she left Redwood."

"And you to her?"

"Once or twice. Oh, Vaughan, it is not courteous of you to go on talking like this!"

"Farquhar, try that pie. I particularly wish to know about Miss Kendal. What has her ladyship been doing all this time? What is she about now?"

"Wait a more fitting opportunity, and I will tell you," said Caroline, colouring, as, with a slight and not ungraceful assumption of dignity, she turned from her questioner, and addressed some remark to Mr Farquhar.

Vaughan vexedly bent all his attention on his plate, and would not for some time join in the conversation of the others. At length, however, with a sort of magnanimous toss of the head, and a frank, half-apologetic smile, he pushed away his plate, in token of having finished his breakfast, leaned his head on his hand, and appeared to be listening with great interest to what they were saying. But somehow Caroline was not her easy, natural self, and this evident scrutiny did not tend to increase her composure. She answered at random; she fell into reverie, in spite of her frequent self-corrections, when she would look round with a start, and eagerly begin to join in the conversation. It was a relief when she could rise from the table and quit the room.

But on the staircase Vaughan overtook and detained her.

"You slippery little thing, I want to speak to you."

"I am going to my uncle. He has a cold."

"It isn't a mortal complaint. Now curiosity is —suspense is. With those two diseases I am suffering, and in a very bad way. Come into the drawing-room."

He took firm hold of her wrist, and compelled her in at the open door.

"You hurt me, Vaughan," she cried, the tears starting to her eyes.

He looked intently on the pretty reddened mark his fingers had left on her wrist, then kissed it—once—twice. He glanced for a moment at her flushing face as he let the hand go.

"Is it well now?" he asked, audaciously. "Or shall I ——"

"Be silent, Vaughan! I am hurt, grieved, angry enough with you for one morning. I thought my cousin—my friend—my old playmate, was at least a gentleman."

If he expected to be amused by her indignation, he was also involuntarily affected by it. The

indescribable swagger was put off. In a subdued tone he addressed her.

"Sit down, then; I did not mean to offend you, Caroline. But you are very contrary this morning yourself; why couldn't you answer me just now at breakfast what I wanted to know? You are aware how keenly interested I am in anything that concerns your ancient *gouvernante*. Sanctimonious old soul! how comes she to write to you?"

"I dislike your way of speaking. Miss Kendal should be mentioned with respect, at least."

"I have no reason either to respect or to like her. There was not any love lost between us, I believe. I am sure she always behaved most unpleasantly to me. I wish you would have nothing to say to her, either by personal or postal intercourse."

"It is unlucky for your wish," Caroline remarked, "that she is about to take up her residence so near Redwood. In a few weeks she is coming to live at Beacon's Cottage."

"The deuce she is! I fancied something of the kind," he added, with ire. "Miss Kendal was

always famous for making differences between you and me. It reminds me of the old days of cricketing and boating, when you used to put me off because you had to 'go out with Miss Kendal.' I never had any patience with your affection for that woman. If I could have helped it, it shouldn't have existed."

Caroline coloured, with many conflicting thoughts. The foremost of all was a highly sensible satisfaction that he did not know the real and effectual extent of his influence. She kept silence.

"What in the world brings her to this part of the country again?" he muttered. "I thought when she left us she was going abroad with some East Indian family. I hoped she was comfortably disposed of."

"But Mr and Lady Camilla Blair are about returning to Madras for two years, and meanwhile leave their children under Miss Kendal's care. And she has chosen to come here. The house is already taken."

He stood pulling at the tassels of the sofa-cushion with a petulant air. At length, however,

he looked up, laughing. "It isn't worth being vexed about; and, after all, Carry, I don't so much mind. She won't be your governess, and will have something better to do than lecturing you, and tugging you about, botanising and moralising, &c. So we won't talk about her any more. Just play me '*Fra poco*.' You haven't forgotten it in all this while?"

He looked tolerably confident that she had not. He opened the piano, and then luxuriously extended himself on the sofa, while she played to him some of his favourite operatic morceaux—luscious, flowing music, dreamy even in its passion, dulcet in its pathos, such as one would naturally close one's eyes, physically and mentally, to enjoy. He lazily opened his, when at last she ceased playing, and rose from the instrument.

"Don't go yet, Carry; it's so pleasant."

"But I must see my uncle now. You know the horses are ordered at twelve, and it is now past eleven."

Her step was decisive, as she passed down the long room by his sofa, whence he gazed at her

entreatingly and detainingly. He saw it was no use to protest or complain. She went out at the door, and he rose, yawned, and sauntered to the window with his hands in his pockets, meditating, after the manner of men.

"How handsome she is grown! No milk-and-water school-girl either. Something to interest as well as to attract. It is fun to see her angry, all the while knowing that her love is fifty times stronger than her indignation. Dear little soul, I prize her affection very much; it is worth anything to come back to it as a rest after —— Hum —hum!"

The meditation floated off into vague air, as he quitted the room, descended the staircase, and sought his friend Mr Farquhar to come and play a game at billiards, till the time for riding.

Meanwhile Caroline stopped on her way to Mr Hesketh's apartment;—likewise musing.

"I wish Vaughan was —— I wish I did not care quite so much about —— I wish—I wish ——"

She got no further.. And very wistful, and a little perplexed, was her face as she thus paused,

looking out on, but hardly seeing, the soft August sunshine, which seemed to rest in visible repose on the broad lawn. But her face grew clear again, and she went in to her uncle with her own fresh gaiety of aspect and manner.

"Oh, it is the fairest, sweetest morning," she cried; "it is dreadful to think of you in here, burrowing close to the fire, and with that fiery dressing-gown on You will come down to lunch, won't you?"

"Surely. Come here, my child."

She came, and knelt down beside his chair. He gently turned her face, so that he could look full into the clear eyes.

"Are you very happy this morning?"

"Happy!—I? Dear uncle, what do you mean?"

"Were you pleased with your birth-night ball?"

"Oh yes."

"And glad that Vaughan is at home again?"

She coloured vividly. He let her droop her face then, but she lifted it again the next minute, saying, but not quite so distinctly as before, "Oh yes, I am always glad of that."

"That is well." In quite a changed tone he went on:—"What do you think of Mr Farquhar?"

"I did not like him at all, at first; but I do now."

"That is right. I like him—I have confidence in him. He is much what his father was at that age. I knew his father very well. Did I tell you? Yes—poor John Farquhar and I were great friends," he went on, in an abstracted tone. Then, less thoughtfully, he added—"You are going to Crooksforth this morning, are you not?"

"Yes. How pleasant it will be, uncle! Oh, I wish you could come too. Do you think ——"

"No, my pet. It will be pleasanter for me to rest quietly at home. I have some letters to write. By the way, tell Vaughan I will see him in the afternoon; he can come in to me after you return from your ride."

"But, won't you come down-stairs by that time?"

"I think not, dear. I have letters to write."

"You look tired. Couldn't I write the letters, or Vaughan? Do let him."

The old gentleman shook his head, and smiled reassuringly, in reply to her half-anxious look. She busied herself about the room for a little while, put fresh water to the nosegay with which she constantly supplied his table, stirred his fire, drew the blinds to a convenient height, all with the officious tenderness which it is alike so pleasant to give and to receive. Then she kissed him, and went to dress for her ride.

* * * * *

The ride proved a great pleasure. Part of the way lay along a broad ridge of road much elevated above the country on each side, and thereby commanding views at every turn, both extensive and various. The sweet English valleys were smiling their loveliest; little nest-like villages clustered below the brown hills, or shone out from amid soft foliage of the goldening trees. Park, and meadow, and moorland stretched out widely under the sunny sky, with cloud-shadows dappled upon them, and breaks of intense sunlight, making islands of glory in the broad landscape.

The west wind, fresh and life-giving, was like

the very breath of the sunshine, Mr Farquhar declared, while he turned his head to meet it, his face glowing with fulness of satisfaction. "Today I can understand what has so often seemed an enigma to me—the joy of living—the absolute pleasure of existence. Simply *to be* is a good thing, after all."

"Did you ever doubt it?" Caroline asked.

"I never doubted—I disbelieved," he answered; "a much more satisfactory process," he added, with a half-bitter smile. "It saves much wear and tear of spirit. To temporise between the two points of belief and unbelief, strikes me as a dangerous waste of time and expenditure of energy. What we know—we know. It is quite enough for us, very likely."

Caroline did not reply, partly because she was not quite clear of his meaning. Had she thoroughly comprehended, she might have found rejoinder equally difficult.

"Come," Vaughan impatiently interrupted, "you may as well put metaphysics aside for once. My poor little cousin isn't used to be deluged with

moral philosophy in this way, on week-days, at least. You're interfering with Mr Turnbull's prerogative."

"Who is Mr Turnbull, may I ask?"

"Our vicar. He lives in that beautiful place we passed yesterday; he is a 'pluralist,' and has about £3000 a-year. You needn't ask any more about him. He'll speak for himself next Sunday. He always preaches at morning service."

"Exemplary man! It is not every wealthy divine would condescend to a village congregation. Such humility is quite apostolic."

"Oh, he is an excellent person—gives the best dinner-parties in the neighbourhood. An enviable career, I always thought. A few years ago I greatly inclined to the church myself, and sometimes I regret heartily enough that I did not take to it."

"You regret?" echoed Mr Farquhar, with an involuntary glance.

"Yes. It's better than the bar, I should imagine. Not a quarter the labour brings four times the result, in most cases. Oh, I know what you

mean; of course there is less fame, less glitter obtainable. But then look at the solid advantages of a capital benefice. Say £1200 a-year; deduct £80 for your curate, and there you are!"

"Exactly; there you are!" repeated his friend, looking at him meaningly.

Vaughan met his eye, and laughed, in some confusion.

"Of course," he went on, "you must not take what I say *au pied de la lettre*. Unluckily, I am troubled with a conscience," he sighed, while pensively switching his horse's neck, "and that stands confoundedly in the way on many occasions."

"How so?"

"In this very case, for instance. There was preferment in the family—my uncle wished it—it would have been, in a worldly sense, an excellent thing. But ——"

"Did my uncle ever wish you to be a clergyman?" asked Caroline, innocently. "I thought ——"

"Oh, it was before your time," said Vaughan, hastily; "you were not likely to hear of it. In

fact, I have carefully avoided the subject with my uncle ever since. It is a sore point."

"But why didn't you do as he wished," persisted she, "if it would have pleased him so much?"

"My dear Carry," he answered, loftily, but affectionately, "I would do much to please my uncle, but a man must satisfy his own sense of right before everything."

She looked rather puzzled.

"You cannot understand? It is not to be expected that you should," he said, looking down at her with an indulgent air. "Life has many things in it that you would find incomprehensible at present."

"At present, and always, let us trust," said Mr Farquhar, earnestly. "The tree of knowledge was always fatal to the daughters of Eve. Avoid it, Miss Maturin; don't stand under its shade, far less eat of its fruits."

But Caroline did not approve of the doctrine. She was always inclined to feel tenacious when people asserted superior knowledge, seeming to shut her out from discussion as a child, or an *igno-*

rante, whether the subject were polemical, ethical, or a mere simple matter of social experience.

"On the contrary," she declared to Mr Farquhar, "I shall take every opportunity of enlarging my information. I despise ignorance. If I could, I would like to know thoroughly all the good and evil in the world, and take my choice."

Though he smiled at her energy, his eye kindled into a sympathetic fire with that which flashed over all her young face.

"You are ambitious," he said.

"Are not you? Does not everybody that *we* should count worthy, aspire? I think to be easily contented is a very mean virtue."

"Excelsior!" cried Vaughan, enthusiastically. "Carry, we always liked that story, you remember?"

She nodded, her eyes beaming at the dear old memory he knew so well how to evoke.

"Nevertheless," said Mr Farquhar, more drily than he had before spoken, "to be easily contented is a comfortable faculty, greatly longed for by older persons than yourself, Miss Maturin."

"*Comfortable!*" she echoed, with profound scorn.

"Even so; man must have something. He sees nearly all his ambitions crushed, his dreams dissolved, his hopes, aims, and ends, dwarfed, distorted, or destroyed, by the time he is forty; so he even falls back on what you contemn, and when he can neither be great nor happy, he finds it very convenient to be comfortable."

She did not understand the bitter irony with which he spoke: she took all he said literally, and in the uncompromising insolence of her youth and inexperience, disdained it as mean and unworthy. Yet, the next minute, a glance at his face obtained from her instinct what it would have been vain to ask from her reason and justice. She could not help compassionating this man—nay, she could not help a certain involuntary trust in him. His reality and truth magnetically appealed to her own. So the curl of the rosy lip waved into a smile, half sad, half sweet, and wholly womanly, with which she turned to him, saying, "Let us, at least, wait till we are forty, before we believe in such a dreary doctrine."

"Are you so happy as to be able to command your belief?" he asked her, smiling also, but with a curious earnestness in the midst of his jesting tone. What a benefactor to his species would he be who should impart such a gift to the world at large!—'Belief taught in six lessons!' They professed to teach memory in that way, some time since—why not Faith? which, after all, is to the future very much what memory is to the past."

"But, though artificial memory might be of some service," said Caroline, amused, "artificial faith would be a very frail, useless thing, I am afraid."

"From flowers, upward or downward, Caroline scorns simulations," cried Vaughan; "let us have the real article, or none. It is the genuine British disdain of shams."

He laughed, and so did Caroline, because she was too young and too happy to feel at all deeply in the matter they were discussing. Like many another, she thought and talked ignorantly of Faith, as one who had never been in deep waters might think and speak of a life-boat.

Mr Farquhar looked at their laughing faces,

silently. They rode onward at an increased pace, and conversation was checked for a time. When they drew rein, it was to dismount from their horses, and leaving them in charge of the groom, to ascend the much-talked-of Crooksforth Hill.

Caroline, in glee, ran forward. Vaughan linked his arm within his friend's, and they followed more deliberately.

"Well, what do you think of my cousin? Isn't she pretty?"

"She is pretty," returned Mr Farquhar, with an unusually sententious air.

Vaughan was surprised; and oddly, too, felt both relieved and annoyed at the moderation of the reply.

"Is that all you have to say? Why, I myself was struck when I saw her last night. She was a mere school-girl when I left Redwood—a child, comparatively.

"She is little more now, I think." And the speaker's eye followed the lithe figure of Caroline, as she bounded up the somewhat steep ascent.

Once she turned back to look at them, and her

laughing face and golden hair flashed on them for a moment, like a sudden light upon the bare brown hill. But, presently, in its dusky crest of pines, she was lost to their view.

"She is very young still; her manner is unformed, and so forth," Vaughan then resumed. "She has little of what you would call 'style,' or *l'air de saciet'*. But all that will come."

"Will it?"

"Of couse it will. Miss Maturin is not likely to lack those necessary graces when they become necessary. At present, in this country circle, their absence may pass unnoticed; but trust me," added the young man, evidently somewhat chafed by the other's indifference, "you'll hear of her yet in London."

Mr Farquhar seemed amused.

"You defend Miss Maturin's claims as a belle and a woman of the world with most creditable zeal," he remarked.

But even while Vaughan looked at him, a little puzzled as to his meaning, the unconscious subject of their talk came towards them, back from the

summit of the hill. She was arranging some sprigs of heather—purple, pink, and white, into a little bouquet.

"Are not these lovely? Look, Vaughan, this is a peculiar kind of heather, which does not grow on the moorlands."

"I see; it is very pretty. How carefully you have arranged them. Are they for me?"

"No, indeed; I gathered them for my uncle. He has a mountaineer's love of heather."

Vaughan detected Mr Farquhar's slight smile, and was annoyed thereat.

"Carry, *do* give them to me; I want them," he whispered. "I will get some more for my uncle —give me these."

She gave them, looking half-wonderingly at him. He bestowed them with much *empressement* in his button-hole, and then turned to Mr Farquhar.

"We may as well descend, I suppose. The horses will be impatient."

"And we have sufficiently enjoyed the romantic view we came to see," was the grave addendum.

In fact, only Caroline had thought about the

magnificent prospect at all, and she had been very speedily diverted therefrom to the tiny flowers glancing so brilliantly and invitingly from the ground.

"Such is life!" Mr Farquhar said, theatrically waving his hand; "and so end its great aims! We climb with much toil and trouble—and forget what we came for. The more philosophical gather the flowers at their feet, it is true ——"

"And give them away when gathered!" Caroline concluded, with a ringing laugh. "Oh, Mr Farquhar, how soon I could learn to talk wisely and metaphysically, like you! I think I begin to see the vanity of all things already. What is sunshine, and a south wind, and a breezy hill, and a broad prospect, after all? What good does it do us to be able to see the steeple of Fairpoint on one side, and the Thurlston Hills on another, and the ships in Stilford Harbour on another, and wide valleys, and spreading pastures, and abrupt moors in between? What use is it all?"

She shook her head with an affectation of grave discontent irresistible to see. And still chattering

her saucy nonsense, she began tripping down the hill. Her companions followed, laughing.

"It would take a good deal to make *her* see 'the vanity of all things,'" said Vaughan; "she has too keen a sense of enjoyment. Such a day as this makes her happy—she needs nothing more."

"I perceive." A pause. Then Mr Farquhar added: "Indeed, she seems—Miss Maturin seems specially constituted by nature, as well as by circumstances, to be *happy*. Fate seems to have pleasure in crowning her with all best gifts. Her cup of joy overflows."

"Oh yes!" said Vaughan, carelessly; "she has been happy enough, I suppose, since she came to Redwood. My uncle adopted her, you know. She has no other friends in the world but us."

Mr Farquhar looked at him with a queer glimmer in his eyes for an instant; then he relapsed into meditation, which lasted even till they overtook the young lady, and were walking beside her.

The ride home was a merry one. The mood of

all seemed lightened and exhilarated by their taste of the free air on Crooksforth Height. Mr Farquhar, especially, after his last reverie seemed to fling off the last suspicion of "wisdom and metaphysics," and yielded himself to the pleasurable influences of the time. A fund of quiet humour, and better still, of genial appreciation, began to be evident in this gentleman. Caroline had no idea he could be half so pleasant, so likeable. Her fast-increasing regard manifested itself in the bright glances she turned upon him, and the unconstraint and entire frankness with which she began to talk.

When she alighted from her horse, Mr Farquhar being at some little distance, she was able to relieve her mind, by whispering to Vaughan, "Oh! I was unjust to your friend. I like him *so* much!" With which she gathered up her long skirt, and flitted into the house.

"Vaughan," Mr Farquhar proposed, "let us take a few turns on the terrace. This sunshine is like veritable *elixir vitæ*. Come!"

But Vaughan's face was slightly clouded. He

demurred. "I have to go to my uncle. I'll join you afterwards, if you like. Must go now." And he turned in at the wide-open door, leaving Mr Farquhar to make his way to the terrace by himself.

Chapter V.

It was late in the afternoon when Vaughan Hesketh left his uncle's room, slowly descended the staircase, and entered the study. No one was there. A fire was burning, and Mr Hesketh's great chair was drawn towards it, awaiting him. But the window was open, and on the table near, two or three books had evidently been recently laid down. Moreover, a cambric handkerchief lay on the floor beneath the window—Caroline's handkerchief, with her initials embroidered in the corner. Vaughan took it up, and regarded the fanciful letters with curious thoughtfulness for a long time. He was disturbed in his reverie by the faint sound of voices at a little distance, floating gently on the evening quiet. Yes, there she was, and Mr Farquhar beside her. Both were standing at the end of the terrace, looking at the young moon that was

just rising over the tops of the pines. The musical vibration of Caroline's sweet laugh reached his ears.

He stepped out, and taking a slanting path across the lawn, overtook them as they slowly paced the broad terrace. He noticed that Mr Farquhar was talking earnestly, and Caroline listening with interest; he noticed also that the gentleman held in his hand a shell-pink rose, which he knew must have been gathered from Caroline's own particular tree. Somewhat brusquely he broke in upon the conference.

"Did you know you had lost this, Carry?" holding up the handkerchief.

"Oh! thank you. Is my uncle coming down now? Does he seem better?"

"He appears pretty well, and is coming in to dinner. You have been admiring the moon, I suppose?"

"Why do you suppose?"

"Oh! you look like it. There's a peculiar sonnetish appearance in the eyes of persons under such circumstances. You'll see it in me presently. I already begin to feel in blank verse."

Caroline laughed lightly. Mr Farquhar was silent.

"I could make a poem about you, Carry, this minute," Vaughan went on, as if restlessly bent on talking. "You look completely poetic in that white robe, with the blue shawl wrapped about you, and that fair young crescent behind your head. I allude to the moon, which evidently counts it a destiny enough to 'fill the ambition of a moderate moon'—to make an ornament for your back hair. I think I must get you a moon of your own, Carry, in mother-of-pearl."

"You are very kind," she responded, in her gayest tone.

Not a suspicion of embarrassment clouded her smile. Presently she looked at her watch, and exclaiming at the lateness of the hour, she fled across the grass, and disappeared inside the study-window.

The two young men walked on for a little time in silence; then Vaughan, with some slight hesitation, commenced by saying, "I have been thinking, George, that the full disclosure I in-

tended making to my uncle had, after all, better be postponed."

"Your reasons," his friend rejoined, after a somewhat blank pause.

"Nay, don't think me capricious or obstinate," said Vaughan, with a frankness that it was very hard to resist. "I know you have my promise, and if you still claim it, it shall be done; but ——"

"The arguments that were cogent a month since are surely not less so now. Time only increases your difficulty. For what reason did I accompany you to Redwood, but to make your confession of extravagance and debt easier, by its coming through a third party ——"

"For whose name my uncle has an unusual respect," put in Vaughan. "Don't suppose me so cowardly as to have placed a duty upon other shoulders, merely because they were not mine. I knew well that from *your* lips the old man would receive patiently, what otherwise might at once exasperate him beyond reason."

"Then why postpone it till I am no longer here to fulfil the office?"

"But you will be here again often, I hope. And you will not count your visit valueless, even though its primary motive should fail?"

Mr Farquhar made no immediate reply. With his eyes bent downwards, he appeared to be musing rather intently.

"Well, Vaughan, give me your reasons for delay."

"My uncle is evidently not in his usual health and spirits just now. He tells me he has had some heavy losses—that some speculations in which he was concerned have failed. He received the tidings only this morning. You see, therefore, that to add to this—would ——"

"Would be additionally painful, I grant; but the necessity is none the less, nor the duty."

"But, under the present circumstances, it is not his anger that I dread—it is his grief. He is depressed at present more than I ever saw him. Look at all sides of the question. I am his adopted son—his heir: to me he looks for help—for comfort. If, instead of this, I but bring him new troubles, it is enough to break his heart. His in-

dignation, his displeasure, I could bear—but his sorrow—George, spare me that!"

He spoke with an earnestness that made his voice falter. His friend turned to him, and looked steadily in his face.

"I cannot quite understand you," he said, dubiously. "From what you told me of your uncle, I was led to expect a hard, harsh disciplinarian, rather than the genial old gentleman I find—or the tender-hearted being you now speak of. You said nothing of his probable distress—it was his unreasonable anger you deprecated."

"That is true, I admit. When away from him, I thought more of his stern strictures, of his uncompromising business-like love of prudence. But I come here, and I find—himself! softened, too, by troubles of his own, kinder and more loving than he has ever shown himself to me." The speaker glanced at his companion's face, but the drooped eyes and inflexible lip told little. He went on—"Then, again, there is another consideration—dearer, sweeter, holier than all—my cousin Caroline. I could not bear to crush her—to sadden her ——"

The rigid mouth of the listener quivered; the impassive face flashed as with newly-kindled light.

"To *crush* her? I do not comprehend ——"

"At least it would cause her some misery. Remember, George—she loves me."

"Loves you?" he again echoed.

"Loves me! Her tenderness and devotion are just now at once my pride and my pain. To see her betrothed husband ——" He broke off, as if he expected some interruption here; but Mr Farquhar was once more contemplating the ground, and made no remark. "I forgot," Vaughan resumed; "you do not know, probably, that Caroline and myself have always been intended for one another. Only this morning my uncle was speaking to me of our marriage."

"Is that true?"

Mr Farquhar stood still, facing his companion with an intent but still impassive gaze. The words were uttered more emphatically, perhaps, than he was aware of. Vaughan coloured angrily, and drew back.

"I presume you do not doubt ——" but he did not finish the sentence, though Farquhar's look still questioned him. "Pshaw!" said he, laughing frankly, "I am a fool indeed, to let my hot temper come between me and my best friend. Yes, George, it is true."

"And she loves you?"

"Is that so incredible to you? Are you so greatly surprised? Your amazement speaks well for our behaviour. Lovers are not generally so difficult of detection."

Mr Farquhar suddenly swerved aside from his companion, and stooped to pick up a stone. He seemed to expend much energy in flinging it into the midst of the dark foliage of an *arbor vitæ* on the lower lawn. Vaughan laughed at him, and at the whimsical interruption to their discourse.

"You are half boy yet at heart, George; but be your full age just at present. I need your most mature wisdom."

Mr Farquhar again turned to him, with a face that was pale and grave enough effectually to scare away all jestings.

"On such subjects of discussion as the present, a man's own honest feeling is his best wisdom."

"So I think," said Vaughan, quickly. "I am aware that, in a merely worldly sense, my best, and easiest, and wisest plan would be at once to tell my uncle of my unfortunate involvements. I know the extent of the result. He would be angry—forgive—and pay. But other considerations intervene. I have told you what they are. Caroline ——"

"Miss Maturin loves you, you say?"

"You seem oddly incredulous of the fact. Just use your perceptive organs the next time you see us together."

Mr Farquhar's eyes blazed on him for a moment, in sudden and fierce disdain. With an effort he controlled it.

"There is another side to the question, which apparently does not occur to you," he went on: "Do *you* love *her*, Vaughan?—do you love Miss Maturin?"

"I cannot conceive why you should doubt that either. I have known her from childhood; she is beautiful, intelligent ——"

"I asked you a question—will you answer it straightforwardly? There is no time for quibbling ——"

"And no desire on my part," declared Vaughan, with an air of injured candour. "Of course I love her, as a man *should* love the woman he looks on as his future wife."

Mr Farquhar made no reply. They walked on.

"It is not necessary that I should *say* more on such a point," Vaughan resumed; "the dearest feelings of a man's heart are not commonly the oftenest on his lips."

He was interrupted by the apparition at the study-window of Caroline's white-clad figure. She beckoned to them. "It is nearly dinner-time. My uncle is in the dining-room. Do come in."

Mr Farquhar, without a word, left his companion, and entered the house by the side-door. Vaughan joined Caroline at the window. He detained her there. In the soft evening light he looked at her earnestly, and appeared to derive great and growing satisfaction from the sight. Truly it was a pleasant one. The glamour of youth was about

her—a star-like purity, a child-like grace, in trembling conjunction with the budding consciousness of womanhood. Moreover, with the spiritual beauty, the impalpable enchantment that environed her, there was mingled something intensely real and human—something that told of depths as yet untroubled, lying far under the unrippled calm and translucence of her soul—something that, while it suggested faults and shortcomings, also revealed the power to conquer the one, and the nobleness that made up for the other. Because, whatever else was there, there was also Truth, unsullied and uncrooked by conventional sophistries or cowardly self-delusions; truth—white, crystalline, and absolute. Whoso have such are not without a reflex of God's presence, albeit they have not yet recognised His voice.

How much of all this did Vaughan see, as he looked at her, and then gently took her hand? She glanced at him in shy surprise as he did so—but she let it stay.

"We have had a long talk—my uncle and I," said he.

She turned, in quick anxiety.

"Oh, Vaughan! is he displeased at anything? He is not angry with you, is he?"

"Displeased!—angry! what could make you think so? No, indeed. Don't look so alarmed, dear!"

He spoke very tenderly, and drew closer to her, softly stroking the hand he held. Caroline's head drooped instinctively; her heart was beating fast. Some curious and exclusively feminine intuition made her aware that this was neither the old, careless fondness of the boy, nor the more chastened, yet admiring regard he had sufficiently indicated since his return home. Some contradictory, restless feeling made her strive to disengage her hand. though, poor little hand! it felt very happy in his clasp. But he held it firmly; he bent his head lower still, close to her ear, whispering, "We were talking of *you*, and of me, Carry. You can guess what is my uncle's dearest wish; or, if you cannot, you *know*, you must feel, what is mine. Is it yours also? Carry, tell me that you love me!"

He placed his arm round her. She had stood erect and still till then, but *then* she began to tremble much and uncontrollably.

"Tell me; tell me!" he murmured, urgently—"tell me that you are my own, own Carry—now and always!"

There was a pause—a long pause. He spoke again—again entreated her reply. She *could* not answer, it seemed. But presently the lip quivered, unclosed, and "Now and always," she repeated, at last, very softly.

He kissed the downcast brow, and then strove to turn her face towards him.

"Look at me, dearest." And shyly, yet very proudly, too, she looked up at him for an instant—only for an instant Her bedewed eyes met the gaze of his, then she broke away from him. But at the door he caught her hand.

"Don't run from me so soon—I have so much to say."

Again he imprisoned her in his arms, and bent over her, uttering low words—soothing, tender, and fond. For her, she hid her face in her two hands, and let the tears have way that *would* not now be forced back. He watched, the while.

"You are happy—say you are happy, in spite of these tears," he whispered.

Faintly came her reply, but it contented him.

"And I may tell my uncle that all is as he wishes—may I?"

She bowed her head.

"And you will let him see—that—that his great desire is fulfilled? You are not ashamed of loving me, Caroline?"

"Ashamed!" She looked into his face in a very radiance of triumph and joy.

"And we are betrothed? Say again that you are happy—say again that you love me."

"I am happy; I am happy!" She paused, caught his smiling, expectant look fixed upon her. "And—and I love —— Oh, Vaughan! you are the whole—whole world to me!"

Shyness and shame were crushed, and yielded for the moment to the sudden impulse. For a moment she clung to him, as though indeed in him she found her home, her hope, her all. For a moment the strong, full soul overflowed.

Vaughan Hesketh was conscious of a revelation.

So far as he might, he understood and was somewhat dazzled with the intense new light that flashed before him.

Then she fled, and this time he did not seek to detain her. He stood musing, his hands clasped before him, and the peculiar smile upon his lips, that made his face look at once so handsome and so enigmatical. His reflections were doubtless highly satisfactory, not to say exultant; and he slowly quitted the room, saying to himself, "She loves me *desperately*. It is very pleasant. I had no idea that—well, she shall be happy. Beautiful —she *is* beautiful, young, sweet, and loving. Yes, I am quite satisfied."

So he entered the dining-room, and informed Mr Hesketh of the fact of the betrothal.

The old gentleman was leaning back in his easy-chair; the disregarded newspaper lay on his knee, and he was evidently lost in serious, and probably not very pleasing, thought. But when Vaughan spoke to him, and told him what he had to tell, his face relaxed, his smile was a satisfied one.

"I am glad, Vaughan. You are a happy fellow."

"I know it, sir," he answered, fervently.

There was no time for more. The servants entered with dinner; the bell sounded, and presently Mr Farquhar came into the room. Only a few minutes longer they had to wait for Caroline; then she came.

Poor girl! The ordeal of dinner is not the least trying that could be devised for a damsel under similar circumstances. However, she braved and came through it most creditably. She had a rare amount of spirit and resolution, which generally enabled her to achieve what she held to be very desirable. She determined that no outward show should exist of the wonderful new world she had but now entered: no bashfulness, no sentimental blushes or falterings, should, if she could help it, betray one iota of that which she held treasured so sacredly and tenderly. Therefore her demeanour, if not quite so frankly gay as usual, was very much farther removed from bearing any trace of agitation, past or present. Moreover, as the time went on, equanimity became easier, conversation less of an effort. By the time she rose to

leave the dining-room, she had almost begun to understand, without first pausing to consider, the various remarks and questions that were circulating among the *partie quarrée*.

Her uncle rose to go with her to the drawing-room, declaring, in virtue of his being half an invalid, he would for that day assume the privileges of a lady. Vaughan closed the door after them. He appeared slightly discomposed, as he resumed his place opposite to his friend. Neither made any remark, and their talk was listless and disconnected, till Vaughan obeyed with alacrity the announcement that coffee was served, and led the way into the drawing-room.

There, Mr Hesketh on his sofa had Caroline seated beside him, as if they had been talking earnestly. But he loosed her hand when they came in, and she blithely rose and took her usual seat, where her face was half hidden behind the capacious proportions of the massive silver tea-urn. In that retirement, while the three gentlemen conversed over their dainty porcelain cups, Caroline doubtless had her own thoughts, and arranged them

comfortably and "tidily," so that they should not get into the way for the next two or three hours.

And, altogether, the evening passed with more cheerfulness and less restraint than might have been expected. Its events may be briefly epitomised. Mr Farquhar devoted himself to conversation with Mr Hesketh, and o all appearance both gentlemen were soon deeply interested in a discussion on Chancery Reform; a dry subject, from which Vaughan escaped at the commencement, to follow Caroline to the piano, to lean over the back of her chair while she played, and to interrupt by ever-recurrent whisperings the sweet strains of Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, thereby occasioning many varieties of harmony not contemplated by those composers. Light bursts of laughter occasionally rang upwards from this distant corner of the room, and then a momentary glance could hardly be resisted by either of its other occupants—a glance that took in a picture very charming in its way: white-robed, golden-haired Caroline, and Vaughan, handsome and chivalrous of bearing, speech, and look, watching her fingers as they

played elfish tricks about the ivory keys, or trying to tempt her to look up at him for a moment—it was sure to be only for a moment—and then she would droop her head again, and extraordinary bursts of sound would ensue, as if—as, indeed, was the case—she were wrathful with her own self-consciousness.

But at length the evening came to an end. Mr Hesketh was the first to rise, and, after bidding a cordial good-night to his guest, left the room, leaning on Caroline's arm. When the door had closed behind them, Mr Farquhar lighted his candle, and held out his hand to Vaughan.

"Say good-night for me to Miss Maturin. I have some letters to attend to to-night before I sleep."

"Are you really going at once? You look tired, my dear Farquhar ——"

"My dear Vaughan!"

The other held his hand, and looked steadily into his face, with a long, searching look, that would not be denied. Vaughan met it, half wonderingly, yet unflinchingly.

"Are you reading my fortune?" at length he asked, laughing.

"I was trying to read *you*; but I cannot."

"Who should be able, if not yourself?" replied Vaughan; "you who have been to me friend, counsellor, and helper—you who know all my follies and weaknesses as intimately as though I were a conscientious Romanist, and you my father confessor."

"True. And yet—and yet—but I must even trust ——" said Mr Farquhar, somewhat incoherently. And at last he removed his eyes from his friend's face, loosed his grasp of his hand, and went from the room.

And in his own apartment long did George Farquhar sit thoughtful, with a very changeful expression in his dark face—sometimes of pain, keen and sharp enough to make the lip quiver, and to contract the brow as with some physical spasm, anon of doubt, deep and perplexing—till at length pain and doubt were both silenced, as it seemed, by the voice of a strong resolve. And then he rose from his seat, walked rapidly up and

down the room for some minutes, and then—the mouth quite fixed and firm, although the brow was still clouded, and the eyes were not all peace nor all thoughtfulness—he drew pen, and ink, and paper to him, and began to write rapidly.

Let us look over his shoulder:—

"MY DEAR VAUGHAN,—I am going to leave Redwood early to-morrow morning. I beg of you to tender my apologies for the abruptness of my departure to your good uncle, and my earnest thanks for the friendly hospitality he has so kindly shown me.

"So much for myself, now to your own affairs. I have been considering their position, and I can see no righteous solution of the difficulties that would arise from their further postponement. You tell me that your marriage is to take place before long—an additional reason why all should be made clear and straight for your future career. I can, indeed, see reasons why an *esclandre* at this juncture is to be specially deprecated, yet worse even than that would it be for you to take new responsibilities upon you while the trammels of former difficulties still remain.

"Let there be no delay. Arrange the whole matter at once. I will advance you the requisite sum; you shall repay me at your convenience. I rely upon your often-reiterated assurances and

solemn promises never to incur another of these accursed 'debts of honour.' I rely, too, on the fact that you are about to link with your own fate that of a good and noble woman, whose love, I believe and trust, will awaken in you high ambitions towards a nobler life than has yet been yours. Moreover, I have sufficient faith in your generosity to believe that you will not disregard the knowledge that this loan to you will cripple my resources for the next few years. Let me have the real *happiness* of finding that it has done good service to you and yours. The money shall be paid to your creditors (according to the list of them with which you furnished me) directly I reach London, and the receipts sent to you. I purpose a foreign tour for the remainder of the vacation. When I return, I trust it will be to hear that all has gone well with you. A worthy life lies before you—embrace it! See that you use well the good gifts fate places in your way. Your past scarcely deserves such gifts, Vaughan Hesketh—take heed that your future repairs its errors. I am not given to sermonising, so this must end.—Yours faithfully, GEORGE FARQUHAR.

"Write me word to my chambers that you agree to this. I shall have left for London before this reaches you."

This written, he rang for his servant.

"Jenkins, we leave this at six o'clock to-morrow

—no, this morning. Call me at five; see that the horses are ready. And remember before we start to give this letter to Mr Vaughan Hesketh's man, to deliver to his master as soon as he comes down-stairs."

The servant bowed, and retired, too proficient in his vocation to betray surprise, however sudden the plan. It so chanced, that on his way along the corridor he met Mr Vaughan Hesketh's "own man." He was discreet enough not to mention the fact of their approaching departure; but, in order to prevent accidents, he gave him the letter to deliver to his master next morning. Furthermore, it chanced that the man, being summoned to Mr Vaughan Hesketh's apartment that night, gave him the letter.

He read it. For a little while he appeared to be considering, his hand shading his eyes. He looked up sharply at the waiting-man.

"Was this to be given to me at once?"

"Yes, sir—no, sir. Leastways, Mr Jenkins told me to give it you the first thing in the morning."

"Ah! you needn't mention that you gave it to-night."

"Very well, sir."

And Vaughan Hesketh, serenely content, turned to his slumbers.

Chapter vi.

It was an afternoon in September. One of the fairest autumn days was lingering lovingly and regretfully about the embrowned beeches and dusky firs of Redwood. The shadowy, sweet presence of the season most dear to poet and to artist was discernible everywhere. She glanced from the midst of many a copse and pine-wood; her soft, tender smile shone from faint rifts of cloud that girdled the horizon when sunset was near; the hem of her skirt had touched the dells and hollows where the grass grew lush and tall—had turned the ferns to amber and the grasses to gold. On the smooth turf of the hilly slope that led to the moor, she had left footprints of a pale brown fading colour, that contrasted with the vivid emerald of the moss around the tree-trunks. And across the hill, through the tree branches, and the feathery

grasses, and the amber ferns, came the slanting sunlight, making shadows everywhere, and flickering upon the narrow path leading to the moor, the slightly-marked path which wound and wound itself between the trees and great clumps of gorse, and then was lost, as though it led to a brink beyond which lay only sky and air.

The hall windows looked out on the hill. At one of them Vaughan Hesketh stood, with his hands clasped behind him, his head bent down, and the peculiar eyes, cloudy, ominous, yet with a fiery sparkle in them, looking out as if they saw more than the gleams and shadows of the autumn afternoon. Anon he turned away, and began idly rolling about the billiard-balls, till his quick ear caught the rustle of a robe, and he looked up to see Caroline descending the staircase. She came towards him; the almost serious composure of her face gave way to a smile, and the bloom on her cheek deepened. His own aspect cleared; it brightened into the free, candid sunshine of his best moods as he looked at her, and while he led her to the window, jealously retaining her hand in his.

But she rebelled, and tried to draw it away:—"Luncheon waits; let me go, Vaughan."

"Why should I? What signifies luncheon? Are not we both very happy here, looking out on this bright afternoon *together*?"

"Looking out of window is a mean pursuit, I think," she said, wilfully, but with a happy glance that contradicted herself.

"Oh, Carry! are you going to practise the Farquhar philosophy? Do you begin to see the vanity of all things?"

"I begin to see the vanity of *you*, at least," she rejoined, laughing; "the rest will follow in time. Doubtless poor Mr Farquhar's theory had reason in it."

"*Poor* Mr Farquhar! Why such a tender adjective?"

"Oh, I always felt sorry for him, and I regretted his abrupt departure. I wish he hadn't gone abroad last week. I wish he had staid longer at Redwood."

"Farquhar seems to have made a wonderful impression on your susceptible ladyship."

"Is it so wonderful? Were you not sorry yourself, when your friend left us so suddenly?"

"No, Carry; I had no room for sorrow, regret, or disappointment. I was in perfect content with everything in the world."

She coloured, in silence, as she led the way into the dining-room, declaring again that "luncheon was ready." But apparently neither of them cared much for that repast. It was very soon despatched, almost in silence, and then Caroline seated herself before the fire, and Vaughan took a chair beside her. He leaned his elbow on his knee, his head upon his hand, and looked up into her face thoughtfully. Some fascination seemed to lead the conversation back to the former theme.

"After all," he said, with some emphasis, "he is an excellent fellow, in his way."

"Who?" she asked, waking from her own reverie.

He smiled complacently.

"George Farquhar. I say he is a capital fellow, in his way."

"But what *is* his way?"

"That of a man of the world—a man who has drained life of all its sweetnesses, and is rather apt to quarrel with the dregs because they are bitter. A man of intellect that has been suffered to lie fallow; of fortune that has been misspent or wasted; of position that has been turned to no account. A disappointed, *blasé*, cynical man, Carry, whose nature you can hardly guess at, much less understand."

"I can understand enough to be very sorry," she said, thoughtfully. There was a pause. "I regret more than ever that he did not stay with us," she went on. "Poor man! poor Mr Farquhar! He should not have gone away."

"Of course, he is much to be pitied for not staying. But he seemed to think it inevitable that he should go, and I presume he knows his own affairs best."

"Business affairs—yes. But there are other things. It would have done him good, Vaughan, to have been in this pleasant country, and to have enjoyed the beautiful autumn weather we have had ever since you came down. Don't you remember

the one day at Crooksforth, how it cheered him? He was like a different person after he had been in the fresh, sweet air for an hour or two."

"My dear child, Redwood air is dear to you, I know, and doubly dear to me. But, with all due respect for its merits and its health-giving properties, I yet doubt its power to regenerate a morbid mind."

"Oh, Vaughan! remember that one day on Crooksforth!"

"I *do* remember; shall I ever forget it? But it is not of him I think in connection with that day; it was too full of —— other things. And since then there has been so much happiness in my life, that all morbidness and misery went out of even my remembrance."

He spoke very tenderly, and for one minute Caroline shyly nestled her cheek against his hand.

"Dear Vaughan, it is precisely because I am so happy that I feel doubly compassionate to all who are not so. I yearn to give away out of my abundance."

"I like to hear you say you are happy. I like

to see you look like that —— And you are really happy, Caroline?"

"Have I not said?" she returned, with a bright smile. But it faded a little, as she went on—"If only my uncle were quite well, and himself again, I should be in the condition I used to repudiate—I should have nothing left to wish for."

"He will get strong again, in time; never fear. Dr Barclay thought well of him yesterday, you know."

"Still it is a mysterious sort of ailment, which makes me anxious. Every day he is later in coming from his room; every day, exertion seems more painful and difficult. He was never very active; now his love of repose almost amounts to torpor. And his memory is not so good as it used to be."

"Ah!" said Vaughan, struck by the fact.

"Do you think that is a bad symptom?" cried Caroline, in eager alarm. "Dr Barclay did not take much notice when I told him; he said, with the physical weakness all mental disorder would go. And he is very cheerful, always."

"That is a great advantage. Don't frighten

yourself, or be too anxious, dear child. There is nothing dangerous in the sort of chronic influenza which, after all, my uncle's illness resolves itself into."

But Caroline's serious eyes took no new light.

"Don't look so grave, dearest. Do you know, I fancy your cheek is the least in the world less blooming than it was a week or two since. Suppose we go for a walk?"

He had no cause to complain of her want of bloom at that minute. Radiant and rosy was her blush as she replied, "Oh, Vaughan! I've something to tell you—something you won't like to hear."

"You little puss! I'll punish you ——"

"No; don't laugh. It is really something you will think disagreeable. I knew it last night, but I did not wish to vex you before there was absolute need."

"What is it, then?" he asked, with a momentary peevishness, which escaped him unawares, being the natural protest against anything disagreeable or vexatious which it was part of his character to feel, though he did not always express it.

"It is about Miss Kendal. She arrived at

Beacon's Cottage last night, and I am going to see her this afternoon," said Caroline, bravely and directly.

She could not help laughing at the wry face with which Vaughan received the information. The fact was, he felt rather relieved that it was no worse. He had long since reconciled himself to the inevitable necessity of Miss Kendal's neighbourhood, therefore he was highly philosophical on the present occasion.

"Well, it can't be helped. And she is really there—not a mile from the spot we occupy? After this, I'll never believe in magnetism. If there were any truth in it, I should have felt an oppressiveness in the air when the arrival took place."

"Oh, Vaughan, be good!"

"Would it add to your happiness if I were to resolve to behave well, even to be civil, to Miss Kendal? Do you really wish me to be good?"

"You can hardly believe in such an unreasonable wish?" Caroline laughed, delighted at his gay humour on the obnoxious subject. "But it is true, though; I do wish it—very much."

"Then it shall be done!" he declared, solemnly. "Difficult as the undertaking is, it shall be accomplished; and, to begin at the beginning, Carry, I'll accompany you this afternoon; *I* also will pay my respects at Beacon's Cottage."

He watched her face narrowly, though smilingly, as if he expected to see there something different from the simple pleasure and gratification with which she looked up at him. But Caroline was transparent as air. Her second thought brought a shade to her face, a serious tone to her voice.

"Vaughan, after all, perhaps she would rather that I went alone the first time. I don't think you shall go to-day."

"Indeed!" he said, coldly. "Is your friendship so close and sacred that not even your betrothed husband may come near it?"

His cold glance, his displeased tone, struck home. But something of her characteristic revulsion against all unreasonableness and injustice came to Caroline's aid.

"You must know what I mean, Vaughan. It is

for Miss Kendal's sake, not my own, that I propose to go alone."

"And Miss Kendal is, of course, to be considered before me?"

She was indignantly silent: a red glow fired her cheek; a significant light flashed ever and anon from her eyes. She looked exactly as she had looked when a child, when Vaughan had been what she called "wicked," and herself "cross." Vaughan recognised the look; it was one evoked in an instant, and capable of being dispelled as quickly.

"Oh, Carry! you should not try me where I am most weak. On this point I am utterly unreasonable; I confess it."

"I am glad you confess it."

"Don't upbraid me with that measured tone and chill glance. I really intend to improve; veritably, Carry, the difficult enterprise shall be immediately undertaken."

"So you just now said."

"That is a heartless insinuation. Pshaw! it was half fun, my ill-humour. You may go to Beacon

Cottage as often as you like, and talk by the hour to my good friend there. It does not signify to me. I will trust you."

"Trust me?"

"Yes. If she abuses me as she used to do, if she tries to prejudice you against me, why, let her. Ill-nature will be its own reward."

Caroline's reply had only got as far as a reproachful, but nevertheless evidently relenting, "Oh, Vaughan!" when they were interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who delivered a card to Mr Vaughan Hesketh, and announced that "the gentleman waited in the study."

"In the study! My uncle is not down, is he?" said Vaughan, quickly. He had just glanced at the card, and now rose, crushing it in his hand with evident embarrassment and annoyance. He stood as if considering for some minutes. Evidently he hesitated; but, at last, without turning to Caroline, only muttering "I must see him; I'll be back in a few minutes," he left the room.

Caroline sat still, thoughtful, and a little troubled. Why was it that in the midst of all the happiness

of the last few weeks, would sometimes rise shadows such as this that now reigned duskily over her mind? Why would the sense of unsatisfying incompleteness ever and anon oppress her, while, to all appearance, sunshine most absolute was around her, and, as she had herself said a little while before, she was in danger of "having nothing left to wish for?" It was no tangible care or anxiety that she brooded over now. Her uncle's illness was not in her thoughts. What was it? Even while she tried to penetrate into the mystery of her own spirit, Vaughan returned to her, took his old place beside her, looked at her, but not as before. His face betrayed agitation, his utterance was indistinct and hurried.

"Caroline, I am obliged to go to London immediately. A—a friend of mine is in a strait, from which I must try and relieve him as best I can."

"To go to London? Oh, Vaughan!" was her first cry; but, seeing his look, her feeling changed. "Is it anything very wrong? Tell me—oh, do tell me—if there is anything wrong with you."

"With me? Oh dear, no! It is only an affair

of money; but unluckily I am short of cash, and I shan't know where to find even the hundred pounds, all that is needed."

"Ask my uncle."

"On no account; don't think of such a thing. He would suppose it was some extravagance of— of mine."

"Of course you would tell him what it was for."

"But he is not obliged to believe what he is told," said Vaughan, musing aloud.

Caroline looked at him, in innocent astonishment.

"I'll tell you, Carry; *you* might help me—you might do me the greatest service"

"How? Tell me."

"*You* might lend me the money; you have as much in what you call your 'fund.' You told me so the other day."

"I will go and ask my uncle for it this minute." Caroline rose, blithely. "How glad I am —— "

"Stop, Carry. If my uncle keeps it, if you have to ask him, it is as bad; it is out of the question."

"Dear Vaughan, why should it be impossible to ask him such a simple thing?"

"It *is* impossible; I will not do it. I will brave every difficulty, suffer every pain, sooner. Don't ask me why; it is enough that it is impossible." He looked at his watch "In half-an-hour I must be off."

"How long shall you be away?"

"I cannot tell; I am almost distracted; I don't know which way to turn. Let me think."

He leaned his head down upon his two clasped hands. His trouble and perplexity were evident, and Caroline's heart began to ache. She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Vaughan, can't you tell me all about it?"

"It is another person's secret, which I must not betray, even to you. You won't wish it?"

"Oh no! But if I could only help you."

"Yes, Carry, I thought of you at once; but it is no use; since you can give no aid, my case is hopeless indeed. I depended on you."

"But are you sure I am so helpless?" cried she, eagerly, as thoughts and plans began revolving

rapidly in her mind; let us think;—*do* try and think ——"

"Stay!" Vaughan looked up at her suddenly. "What would you say if my uncle asked you for what purpose you wanted your money?"

"What should I say—what could I, but the truth? I must tell him it is for you."

"But supposing that is *not* the truth. If I want it for some one else—eh, Carry, don't you see?—my feelings and your conscience may be spared at once."

"I don't understand ——" She hesitated.

"If you told my uncle you needed the sum for an immediate necessity—a charitable purpose—don't you think he would be satisfied?"

"Perhaps. But oh, Vaughan! you don't mean—that you would wish —— Think again; you don't see clearly."

"Where would be the wrong? Who would be harmed? On the contrary, how much good would be done by this simple reticence—nothing more. You say nothing but what is true—only you do not tell the whole truth."

"But he knows I always tell him the *whole* truth. To speak as you say, *would* be deceiving—or trying to deceive."

"You are misled by terms. Truth is valuable for its *effects*. In order to maintain peace and order, and for the better understanding between men, truth is a good and advisable thing; when, instead, it is likely to promote trouble, disorder, and ill feeling, it is false principle to stickle for its maintenance."

She stood hanging her head before him. His sophistries and his trouble together were smiting violently at the gates of her heart. She so longed to believe him right—to be able to help him. To think him "mistaken"—and her severest thought went no farther—was a sore pang. She was very young, all but a child, and alas! one who had not learned that wisdom transcending all logic, and rising superior to all cant of world experience—that simple but sufficient wisdom which is to be learned and received "as a little child." But the true instinct of her fresh and unwarped nature held her upright. She took Vaughan's hand, and looked

into his face with her clear eyes, steadfastly—"It would not be right—you will feel so too, presently."

Vaughan rose abruptly, breaking from the gentle hold. "It is nearly time; I must see my uncle before I go."

"Oh, if you would only ask him ——"

"Pardon me; I have told you. Nay, Carry," for her pleading look would not be denied, "I am only sorry I have worried you and wasted my own time to no purpose. We only seem to misunderstand each other by talking. Let me go, dear; I will come again as I go out."

He did come again, after a very brief interview with Mr Hesketh, who was at once satisfied, it seemed, by the cogent reasons Vaughan doubtless adduced for his sudden journey to London. But it was Caroline with a very different aspect that met him in the dining-room—Caroline with a bright, eager face, and a quivering smile—Caroline bearing in her trembling hands a box, some twelve inches square, of ebony and pearl—a significant-looking box.

"Oh, Vaughan! the happiest thought came to

me just after you had gone," she cried, as he entered the room, and while she hastily and tremulously disengaged a little golden key from her watch-chain. "You want money—I haven't money, but I have all these, which can be sold, and will be as good as money—won't they? Vaughan, won't they? and your friend can be helped, and all will be right. Look here!"

Tear-drops of sheer joy glistened in Caroline's eyes as she unlocked and opened the casket and displayed her treasures. They were not many, but were mostly of value. There they shone in their pretty velvet recesses—rings, bracelets, two or three brooches, and one dazzling ruby necklace.

"Will all these make up a hundred pounds, do you think?" she asked, anxiously, and looked up in his face for the answer.

Let it never be forgotten, in the record of Vaughan Hesketh's thoughts and deeds, that he was touched by the young girl's artless generosity, that his first impulse was to draw her to his side, and say, emphatically—meaning what he said, too—"Dear Carry, I won't touch them for the world!

Keep your trinkets, you dear little soul, and I'll manage as best I can."

"But how can you? Do take them—you don't know how glad I am!—and then all your trouble will be over."

He kissed her—this time without verbally deprecating her plan. He even looked with a half-calculating glance at the jewel-box. She went on, flushed with eagerness, "I shall think of you so happily after you are gone, if I know everything is right, and you are not going to be worried or miserable. *Do* take them?"

"Your jewels! I can't. Suppose my uncle should ask about them?"

"Some day I could tell him." Vaughan frowned. "Or," she went on, bright with a new idea, "could not you sell them as people do in books, and ask the man to keep them, and let us buy them back again some day."

He seemed struck by this suggestion.

"Think, Vaughan, couldn't you?"

She urged him, with dewy eyes, and cheeks all flushed with earnestness. He listened, and glanced

at the ornaments, and smiled on her, and pressed her hand to his lips many times.

And so it came to pass, that some ten minutes afterwards, Caroline watched from her dressing-room window the departure of the carriage for the railway station. Vaughan sprang to his seat beside the lawyer-like gentleman, his visiter, and Vaughan held carefully under his arm a certain square brown paper parcel. He looked up at her window, waved his hand, and was no longer in her sight.

And then Caroline sat down and cried; what for, she could never have told—for she was relieved, glad beyond expression. Everything was happily arranged, and Vaughan was to be back the next day but one. However, so it was—she cried heartily and long, and when she rose from her chair, and looked out of the window, the September twilight had shadowed everything, and with a flash the thought came into her mind, "It is too late now, to go to Beacon's Cottage."

A knock at the door, and Miss Maturin's maid announced—"Miss Kendal has just come, miss, and is waiting to see you down-stairs."

Chapter vii.

A LADY dressed in black, middle-aged, of a dignified presence, with a calm face, neither handsome, nor remarkable for anything except a certain expression of quiet humour and equable self-possession, which was thoroughly womanly, although not often seen in women. This was the outside aspect of her who advanced a few steps to meet Caroline, took her for an instant into her arms, kissed her, and then let her go.

"Now sit down, and let me look at you comfortably."

She looked. Caroline smiled, but she could not hide either her embarrassment, or the traces of the tears she had just been copiously shedding. Both might have been detected by eyes of several degrees' less acuteness than those keen but kindly ones of bluish-grey which were now fixed upon

her face. But the tongue was not so quick as the eyes.

"How is Mr Hesketh?" was Miss Kendal's next utterance.

"Not well—he has been ailing for the last two or three weeks."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"At first it seemed only a cold; but it hangs about him very strangely. He is weak and languid—sometimes keeps his room for two or three days together. Dr Barclay has attended him the last few days."

"The doctor! a tangible disorder, indeed," said Miss Kendal, gravely. "And you are nurse, I suppose?" she added, after a pause, looking at her again.

"Very little 'nursing' has been needed, nor, I trust, will be. I almost dread the word—it sounds like a real illness."

"Never mind what it sounds like, my dear; there are real things enough to dread, without taking words into the account. Besides, I've been ill once in my life, and I think respectfully of nurses and nursing."

"How have you been all this while? You look very well."

"I am as I look. How are you?"

The emphasis on the pronoun, slight as it was, caused Caroline to colour. She made the usual reply, that she was quite well.

"And what has been doing at Redwood? Anything happened? You must tell me all your news."

"We had a ball here on my last birth-day."

"Come!—a promising beginning. Go on."

"And—Vaughan brought a visiter—a friend of his from London. You must have heard my uncle speak of Mr Farquhar. His father was an old college companion, and he himself is now Vaughan's intimate friend."

"Vaughan Hesketh has left college, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! He was travelling on the Continent for six months, and has since been studying in London for a barrister."

"Ah! is he at Redwood now?"

"He has just gone to London—this very afternoon."

"Ah!"

Miss Kendal did not glance at the flushed face, with its traces of tears; she stirred the fire in silence.

"I ought to beg pardon," she observed, as she set the poker down. "I forgot I wasn't at home. It seems wonderfully natural sitting here, with you opposite to me. You had better go on with Schiller's 'Wallenstein'—where we left off."

With all the dry, half-humorous manner and tone, there was a certain ring of pathos which Caroline felt magically. The latent tears sprang to her eyes again, and almost involuntarily, as if obeying some olden, long-lost, but resumed influence, she slipped from her chair, crouched on the hearth-rug, and leaned her head against Miss Kendal's knee. For a minute or two no notice was apparently taken, but then a hand—not a small, nor an especially delicate hand, but one of harmonious formation, and of an expressive physiognomy, so to speak—was laid on Caroline's soft hair, and rested there with a sort of steady content that was more eloquent than a score of ingeniously-varied caresses.

"Well, have you nothing more to tell me?"

"You have not said a word of yourself, yet," said Caroline, in a low voice.

"One at a time, my dear; don't entangle affairs. After you have made your statement, like the man in the first scene of a French play, I'll enter and unroll *my* budget."

Caroline began twisting and untwisting the fringe of Miss Kendal's mantle. A silence.

"Do you find that assist you much?" asked the lady, peering down curiously. "I would by no means grudge even my best cape to such an end, but ——"

"Ah! don't laugh at me," she cried, suddenly, and in a burst of candour she told that with which her thoughts were full—her engagement to Vaughan Hesketh.

Miss Kendal made no observation while she went on detailing many things that, her tongue once loosed, it was happiness for her to dwell on. At length she paused, and shyly glanced up at her companion's face.

"I suppose you are surprised?"

"My dear, I expected it—my dear, I expected it," said Miss Kendal, abruptly.

There was another pause. Caroline waited. At

last the firm but gentle hands drew her head slightly back; the governess leaned over and kissed her pupil's forehead.

"God bless you, my dear child. Now," in quite a changed tone, "if you like, I will tell you *my* two-years' history."

And she immediately began her record. In not too many terse sentences, with some few graphic touches after her own peculiar style, Miss Kendal gave account of herself.

"*Et me voici!*" she concluded; "to keep up the histrionic fiction—*Apres tant des souffrances*, &c. You know how it goes on."

"And you are established at Beacon's Cottage, with all your family?"

"Not quite all. It reminds me of the story of Dr.——, 'As I and eleven of my daughters were crossing Piccadilly.' No, my dear, I and seven of my household (four children and three servants) are arrived. The remaining one—whom I have not seen for twelve years—comes in a day or two."

"Who is that?"

"A niece of Lady Camilla's, who used to live

with her. She is a grown lady—a widow. Madame de Vigny is her name, for she married a French gentleman."

"A widow! Then she is an old lady!"

"By no means; quite young. She married early."

"But how is it she is to live with you?"

"She is not a pupil, as you will imagine, but many years ago I was her governess, and an old liking subsists between us, though we have not met since she was a child."

"Then she is to be a visiter?"

"Yes; whenever she feels inclined to rusticate."

"Well," pursued Caroline, after a brief pause of consideration, "now for the others—the real pupils."

"Oh, they are nice little things. The poor mother! It half broke her heart to part with them."

"Why did she, then?"

"Well, I conclude it would have wholly broken it to part with her husband; and she had to choose between the two. It was a very painful business. However, the separation won't be for long."

"And Madame de Vigny will be of the family sometimes?".

"Sometimes; yes, she will be of 'my family,' as you call it. I like the term, it has an imposing sound," remarked Miss Kendal. "I hope Blanche will be a pleasant companion for you, Caroline; and for me also."

Caroline mused, and then smiled to herself, recognising the half-jealous tone of her own thoughts respecting Miss Kendal's "pleasant companion." For it was Caroline's not uncommon characteristic that, loving very few, she could ill-brook any interference with her monopoly of those few. It was no wonder, for as yet she had been little tried in that hardest exercise of unselfishness, which enables some women not only to endure, but be content, to see their best beloved finding happiness away from them, and independent of them.

Miss Kendal was likewise thoughtful. It startled them both when the door opened, and Mr Hesketh entered the room, wrapped in a dressing-gown, with his white hair showing silverly under the purple velvet cap which Caroline had daintily

made and embroidered for him. He was leaning on his servant's arm, and walked feebly. Caroline sprang up, and was at his side in an instant. Miss Kendal rose, wheeled the great chair closer to the fire, and placed the footstool ready. And when the old gentleman was seated comfortably, she took his outstretched hand in both of hers, with cordial kindness shining in every feature of her face.

"This makes our group complete," she declared, as she and Caroline re-seated themselves, one on each side of him; "we must have the chess-board out, and Caroline must learn her lessons on the ottoman, and everything must be as it used to be."

But, after she had spoken, and looked at the old man, her face changed; her eyes took a new expression, as they rested first on the old, worn face, and then on the fresh, blooming aspect of the young girl beside him.

"He is so picturesque to behold," said Caroline, fondly stroking the soft folds of his brilliant robe, of Indian pattern and colouring; "he looks like a

gentleman who has come down especially to do a lady honour."

"I am very glad to see Miss Kendal," said Mr Hesketh.

And they began to talk of many things. He was principally a listener, for talking did not appear to be very easy to him, and he leaned back in his chair, as if rest was a luxury that he appreciated to the utmost.

It was not till Caroline, summoned from the room to see some poor pensioner from the village, had left them together, that Mr Hesketh appeared to rouse himself from his thoughts, and at once broke in upon the subject that had been occupying them, apparently, at least, till then.

"Caroline has told you all our news, I suppose: —of the engagement—of my losses?"

No; Caroline had forgotten all about the business details. Miss Kendal had heard of no losses.

"It was her own loss, poor child. Her money was principally invested in some mines, in which I also had embarked a considerable sum, which I intended for Caroline. There is the fatal mischief

of not being a man of business," cried the old man, passionately; "why did they leave the child's fortune in my helpless hands? I understood nothing of these mines; I knew nothing of the chances and changes of such things. My old brains have failed me, I believe. All the shrewdness and clear sight I once possessed have no longer existence. I was bewildered—overwhelmed—struck down—when I heard the news. The whole affair was smashed a month ago. I had the news the day after her birth-day. My poor little girl."

He stopped, fancying Caroline had come into the room again. Miss Kendal reassured him.

"Then, you know, after the first shock, I began to consider that, although this part of my property was gone, I still had Redwood. And though I wished Redwood to descend intact to a Hesketh, and used to have some sort of pride about the estate going with the name, there were some other considerations that swamped all that at once. Don't you understand? I couldn't leave *her* future doubtful or precarious, for all the family pride in Christendom."

"And that's a great deal," observed his listener. "My dear sir, I appreciate your feeling, believe me. Most men, I'm afraid, would sooner sacrifice their religion, to say nothing of a niece or two, than offer a slight to the smallest corner of their escutcheon."

"You may judge," went on the old gentleman, having taken breath, "what a relief it was to me to find all the difficulty settled for me. When I came to speak to Vaughan ——"

"Ah! what did you say to him?"

"Well, I had never taught him to look upon himself as a rich man. He had always understood that his heritage was conditional. I had taken care that his education should prepare him for either position. He is studying for a barrister, and would not be thrown on the world without resources. Don't you understand?" And again he appealed to Miss Kendal. She nodded. "Still I had made my will years ago, by which Redwood descended to him, and in a codicil added afterwards, I left to Caroline all the property in those—those infernal mines. It is not worth a hundred pounds now."

"And you said to your nephew ——"

"I told him the whole state of the case. I was in a good deal of trouble. The thing knocked me over. I told him everything; I told him that Redwood must be settled on Caroline; that he must trust to his talents, and the little money it would be in my power to leave him; I told him—all this, you know."

"And he replied ——"

"By telling me that he and Caroline loved one another! I was astonished: for somehow, of late years, my old wishes and plans had faded away. It seemed natural, when first Caroline came here, to look forward, and fancy; but afterwards, I settled that I was a match-making old fool for my pains; these things *never* happen as we wish. You see I was wrong. It all came about even more favourably than I could have hoped."

"It was wonderfully opportune, indeed. You never suspected their attachment?"

"By no means. Vaughan has been so much away, that he had hardly seen anything of Caroline since she was almost a child But they

were always excellent friends, from the very first."

"Oh, I know," said Miss Kendal, biting her lip, meditatively. "And so, under the new light of this happy state of things, you arranged ——"

"Everything is left as before. Redwood, descending to Vaughan, descends to Caroline also. The old will may stand. There is no need to make a division of property between a man and his wife. Don't you see?" said the poor old gentleman, looking anxiously up at her, passing his hand with a weary gesture across his forehead. "Don't you understand—it is all quite right now, and nobody will be wronged."

Miss Kendal glanced at the grey head, smiled kindly, then relapsed into thought again.

"And your old mistrust of Vaughan does not, of course, exist?" she asked, more hesitatingly than it was her wont to speak; "you have had no cause for discontent respecting his conduct, since you paid his college debts, three years ago?"

"Let me see; we spoke about that. He said—he said he had been in no embarrassments since.

He assured me so, solemnly, when I asked him. Because, you know, I could neither have my niece made miserable nor Redwood ruined by a spend-thrift," said the old gentleman, with something like fire flashing in his eyes. "No, no; if Vaughan were not worthy—if I were not entirely *satisfied* that Vaughan is worthy—he should have neither."

"When does Vaughan return from London?" was Miss Kendal's next, and somewhat abrupt, question; "and on what business has he gone?"

"On some affairs—I forget exactly what; but he told me—he told me, before he went. Some affairs ——"

But Caroline entered, and the old man stopped precipitately, and looked at her fresh, girlish face, with embarrassment and fondness mingled very strangely, and even pathetically, in his worn, withered features.

"Come," cried Miss Kendal's cheerful voice, cleaving the mist of constraint like a west wind, clear, and blithe, and keen:—"come to your old place, Caroline, and let us have the old group round the fire. This is pleasant—this is comfort-

able! I need not go back for two hours yet, and at present I am at home."

"We only want the chess-board," said Caroline, half turning to fetch it.

But Miss Kendal detained her, rather hastily. "Not to-night, my dear. We'll sit and talk, for to-night."

So they sat by the fireside, they three. The white-haired old man, leaning back in his chair, sometimes looking up, and saying a word or two, but oftener with drooping head, and eyes half-closed, and hands locked together before him. Miss Kendal, fresh coloured, and especially *vital* of aspect as she always was, sat opposite; and, between them, her arm flung across her uncle's knee, and her head lightly leaning against Miss Kendal, was Caroline, young, blooming, fair, and unconscious.

Chapter viii.

The week after Miss Kendal's arrival, Mr Hesketh did not leave his bed, and the doctor came to see him three times a-day. Much of the peculiar character of a "house with illness in it" began to be perceptible in Redwood. And although Caroline was not as yet definitely anxious about the illness, she felt the subduing influence of its presence; and something of the staid quietude of nurseship already chastened the ring of her voice and the buoyancy of her step. When the patient was asleep, or resting, and she went into the park for a ten-minutes' breathing-space, she felt her loneliness profoundly. Poor child! she had never felt lonely before, though her whole life, so far as companions of her own sex and age were concerned, had been especially solitary. But *now*, the constant cry of her heart was, "Oh, when Vaughan

comes home!" Till it was changed into—"Vaughan will be here to-morrow."

And to-morrow came, and was to-day. Through the long morning Caroline kept by her uncle. He was slightly better, felt stronger, and himself proposed to get up, and sit by his dressing-room fire. And in the afternoon, Caroline left him there, very cosy and cheerful, while she went up to Beacon's Cottage, for a walk, and to see Miss Kendal, and —unconscious instinct!—to occupy the remaining time till Vaughan should arrive.

It had been a soft, cloudy day, and now only faint reflections, rifts of pale light, shone here and there along the horizon. A gentle mournfulness was regnant over the time. The autumn tenderness spoke with more than eloquence to Caroline's heart. She lingered on her way, stopping many times to look around her, and to listen to the quiet sounds that made the silence felt. Faintly whispering, the leaves fell fluttering round, as she passed along the slope of the hill, where oak and beech grew stately and fair. Lower down, in the valley, the little tricksy stream was rippling and

bubbling. Caroline could see its silver light shining through the tangle of greenery that partially concealed it. The long, flat meadows of the valley were flowerless, and their verdure faded; one or two cows were lowing plaintively, with their heads over the hedge, looking out in wistful fashion. Beyond, the long belt of pines shut in the picture. They rose, dark and inexorable, against the vaporous, colourless sky, and a cloud of rooks was gathering above them, with a loud noise that in itself seemed to appeal almost as much to the eye as to the ear.

Beacon's Cottage stood on a hill among hills. The country just there was broken into abrupt dells and steep ascents, like stormy waves of a great sea. On winter nights, the wind held festival among those hills; crashed among the fir-trees, careered fiercely about the treeless moorland, and wailed round the white cottage, with its verandah and trellis that told mockingly of summer warmth and luxuriance. The green garden sloped down towards the woody valley, where, even in the dark days of cold and withering blasts, there was ever a

little nest-like oasis, as of well-protected innocence and peace. It seemed to smile, now, on Caroline as she stood within the garden, on the breezy slope, looking round her. Very low down seemed the happy nook, very lofty appeared the hill on which she stood. The clouds seemed nearer than the valley, and the air, which had been so still awhile before, on this height thrilled and tingled as with stronger life.

Unheard by her, one of the long windows which looked out on the garden was deftly unfastened and opened. Miss Kendal came behind her, and spoke over her shoulder.

"You have found your way, then. That says well for the invalid. He is better!"

Caroline nodded.

"You are a good child to give me a glimpse of you. And what do you think of my castle? It's a nice place, isn't it?"

"I like it. I should like to live here, I think. It is pleasant to feel at the top of things—like this."

"Do you feel that dignity? Isn't it rather a cold one, after all? Come, I want to show you

over the place. I'm proud of my new character of housekeeper, you know. First, let us walk round the garden."

So they walked round, Miss Kendal talking the while, rather more continuously and more trivially than she was accustomed to do. Something in Caroline's face told, perhaps, that she would sooner be listener than speaker. And, in truth, the young girl's heart was throbbing tremulously between a certain depression and a joyful haste of expectancy, that made it hard for her to keep within the narrow centre-way of self-possession.

"The children are out walking with their nurse, or you should see them. Perhaps you will, meantime, be interested in this handwriting." And she showed her the letter she was twirling between her fingers: a letter directed to herself, in the careful, delicate caligraphy chiefly practised by French ladies. "That is Blanche's writing. She tells me that the aunt with whom she stays during her brief sojourn in London is planning all sorts of gaieties for her. A bad preparation for our quiet life on this hill-top, I fear."

"Oh, I hope not," was Caroline's mechanical reply.

Her eyes were wandering wistfully towards that point in the landscape where at this moment a curling cloud of steam, and a rumbling sound, as of swift motion, betokened the course of the railway. Miss Kendal took her arm, and twined it within her own.

"You must come in-doors now, and see the wonders there. Furbish up your stock of admiration, my dear. I like my properties to be appreciated"

Thus she went on, and made no allusion to the flushed cheek and unquiet manner. And when, presently, Caroline restlessly talked of going back—"she must go back—it was getting late—she must go quickly"—Miss Kendal quietly put on her bonnet and shawl, and prepared to go with her. She probably saw, though she took not the slightest apparent notice of it, the momentary start and glance of troubled deprecation with which Caroline received her volunteered companionship on her homeward walk. But she made no remonstrance, no objection, and they walked on together—through

the pine wood, down the hill, and along the broad path on the slope that led to Redwood.

Twilight was closing in as they reached the house. Caroline looked eagerly round, and for the first time suffered her lips to unclose on the subject whereof her heart and soul were full.

"Vaughan is to be here this evening. The train comes in before six, sometimes."

She called to a servant who just then appeared at the gate which led to the stables, and asked him, "Had the phaeton been sent to the station?"

"No, miss."

"How is that?" Caroline turned on the man, sharply. Look and gesture both expressed for the moment an almost fierce displeasure. Only for the moment; instantaneously she came to herself. "I desired it might be sent at half-past five o'clock, Robert."

"My master sent word it would not be wanted this evening, miss. He had a letter from Mr Vaughan by the afternoon post, to say he was not coming to-day."

"Oh, very well."

And Caroline unclosed the hall-door, that Miss Kendal might enter, and walked in after her. Also, she made some remark about the pleasantness of the warm atmosphere within-doors—a remark comprising more words than she had uttered consecutively during that afternoon—all the while feeling as if her heart had left off beating, it had fallen so heavily and blankly *down*. She stood by the hall-fire a minute, looking into the cheery dancing blaze, and saying something about it to Miss Kendal, who had seated herself beside it.

"Won't you sit down too, my dear?" was all the latter said.

"Yes; only I must go up and see my uncle. You'll wait till I come down again? Will you go into the study?"

"I'll wait here," Miss Kendal cried after her, as she was going, and in an instant was gone.

Characteristically quick and decided of movement was Caroline Maturin; the peculiarity was specially observable now. Miss Kendal looked into the fire, in her turn; she muttered to herself some words.

"I knew he wouldn't come; I felt sure of it. My poor little girl!—whom I can't help a bit."

But from that point her thoughts were silent. Caroline was absent some little time. At length she came flying down the stairs. The very rustle of her dress was eloquent of some glad emotion—very different to the restless excitement of a little while before. Miss Kendal glanced at her face; it was rosy with the sweetest, tenderest flush, her eyes were glistening with the softest dews.

"Can he have come, after all?" the governess thought to herself. But no, Caroline did not at first even mention his name. All she said was to beg Miss Kendal would stay that evening. Her uncle felt better, and would be glad to see her. She despatched a servant to Beacon's Cottage with a message, and then led her up-stairs into her own pretty dressing-room, to doff her walking things. Miss Kendal marvelled as to how soon the change would be explained; but Caroline was mute. Once, indeed, she half unclosed her rosy lips with a certain shy smile that seemed indicative of a coming revelation; but a second thought held her silent.

It was not till they were all seated round Mr Hesketh's fire, that Miss Kendal's well-controlled curiosity met its reward.

"Vaughan is detained in town by the illness of a friend," said the old gentleman. "He is a good fellow, that lad, after all. And he is coming—when is he coming, Caroline, my dear? What did your letter say?"

"Next week. On Thursday or Friday," she said, colouring with the consciousness of Miss Kendal's quick glance.

And that lady was thinking to herself, "Bless me! did a letter do it all, then?"

* * * * *

Eight days passed rather strangely. Mr Hesketh's state fluctuated, with such a slight decrease of daily strength, that it was almost imperceptible. Caroline was entirely unprepared for the grave cautionary reply of Dr Barclay, when one morning she asked him, "How soon he thought her uncle might come down-stairs as usual? To-morrow?" (For this was on Thursday.)

"I am afraid not—I am afraid not, my dear

young lady," said the physician, kindly. "It is impossible to say; we will hope. But Mr Hesketh is a very old man, and"—something in Caroline's face made him hesitate, before he finished his sentence—"we must be careful to do nothing hastily."

And so he left her; and she stood still, gazing out of the window by which she was standing, but seeing neither field, nor tree, nor clouded sky. Could the doctor mean ——? No; she thrust the thought from her. There is something in the spirit of a hitherto unclouded youth which makes such things as decay, old age, death, utterly incomprehensible at first. So, though the thought fluttered near to her ever and again, bringing a strange chill, and a breathless sort of feeling, too vague to be even called a doubt, Caroline would not, or could not, place the possibility before her. She was more bewildered than anxious—more perplexed than definitely alarmed.

The intercourse between Redwood and Beacon's Cottage had been for the last two or three days limited to notes and messages. Caroline was un-

remitting in her duties as nurse, and Miss Kendal had "commenced lessons" with the children, and was well occupied. For an hour on Friday afternoon, the governess found leisure to come and see her old pupil. Though it was only a brief visit, she had time to notice how pale and worn the young girl was beginning to look, how heavy her eyes, and how languid her whole bearing became, the instant she relaxed the tension of determined energy which it was part of her character to maintain while there were things to *do*. She mentioned nothing of what the doctor had said. Some curious instinct, perhaps, made her fear to give substance to her own phantasmal thoughts, by communicating them to another. But Miss Kendal hardly needed an interpretation of the girl's changed tone. She could guess the reason. It touched her to see that not even the expected arrival of that evening could quite clear the clouds away, though the sunshine broke through once or twice, as a chance word sent the thought up from the depths where it was treasured so dearly.

"I expect Madame de Vigny by this evening's

train," said Miss Kendal, as she left. "I shall bring her to see you very soon; you are to be great friends, you know."

Her encouraging smile, her cheerful tone, bore their effect. Caroline smiled back again; but it was a smile that set Miss Kendal musing, as she walked quickly home.

"There is something more than anxiety stirring that child's heart; something quite unaccustomed to her thoughts is, little by little, finding place among them. I know it."

And perhaps she was right. Yet Caroline herself, if not absolutely unconscious of a mysterious, impalpable cloud somewhere, would never have recognised whence it came, or in what it consisted. The face of the world was dimmed; but where hung the mists that subdued its brightness?

Very impalpable were the mists, as yet, and very easily to be dispelled. That night, about seven o'clock, they all vanished at the mere echo of a sound—Vaughan's step in the corridor, Vaughan's hand on the latch of the study-door. There stood Caroline beside the fire, before which was drawn

closely the white-clothed tea-table, in waiting for the traveller.

He strode into the room. The first thing Caroline noticed, in the midst of her blushing joyfulness, was how cold and tired he looked.

"I am tired," he admitted, "and cold too. Winter seems coming fairly upon us. How pleasant the fire looks."

And he bent over it, rubbing his hands sedulously, while Caroline was happily busy in making tea, and giving orders for certain refreshments to be brought in, which she had planned beforehand for his delectation. No clouds now on the girl's heart or face, as she made her arrangements, with blithe officiousness, placed his chair, and gaily offered her finger-tips, to lead him thereto.

He flung himself into the chair, and wearily and languidly began to eat.

"Dear Vaughan, how worn-out you look! Tell me—is your friend ——"

She felt ashamed for not having thought of his friend before, and hesitated.

"Oh, he is quite right now—has been getting

better daily," said Vaughan, hurriedly. "And—and everything is all settled—quite right. You need not be uneasy," he added, with a brief glance, that made her blush, as she remembered for the first time the whole of the circumstances connected with his departure. "I wish you had as good news to tell *me*," he went on; "I am completely dismayed, to hear of my uncle's continued illness. I was not prepared ——"

"You know, I wrote and told you," said Caroline, gently. "And he is better now, than when I wrote that letter."

"It was quite impossible for me to leave town *then*," he rejoined, with a curious, sharp discontent in his tone. It startled Caroline; she looked at him, inquiringly. "I am really grieved—I am uneasy about my uncle," he said, "and you too?" He glanced at her for a moment. "You look pale and fagged; you have been overtasking your strength."

"Oh no; I am very well," she answered, cheerily. And then, with the true woman's instinct of consolation, and the true woman's foolish, fond, ear-

row-minded way of judging that to be the sweetest consolation to him which would be dearest to her, she crouched on a footstool at his feet, and took his hand. "All will be well, now you are come home!" she murmured.

He leaned his head upon his other hand, and said nothing. She was perhaps the more content that he did not overwhelm her by any of the caresses with which he had been wont to respond to the faintest indication of fondness on her part. It was her nature to be rather restless under demonstrations of tenderness in general. If she missed them now, it was without any painful sense of loss; and besides, her heart yearned so over him, wearied and troubled as he looked—it had room for little else.

"I shall see him to-night?" was his next question.

"Oh yes; he expects us both, after tea. But you must not look so sad, dear Vaughan. He is stronger to-day; the doctor says so."

"My dear Caroline," he replied, with a sort of uncontrollable irritation, "you must remember, if

I have not quite your philosophy, I have more at stake. He is of my flesh and blood."

Her eyes of pained wonderment were more reproachful than many words. He seemed to feel them so; he stooped, and kissed her forehead.

"I am unhappy about him. I have never known him seriously ill before. Forgive me, I can't think of anything else."

Forgive him? What had she to forgive? It was only natural, and good, and noble, that he should be grieved so much as even to be unreasonable and hasty. And the thought came upon her with a pang of the cruel injustice she, even she, had rendered him, when, two days ago, she had vaguely, very vaguely, thought that his duty to his uncle at Redwood should come before his duty to his friend in London. She had a royal munificence of soul, which never rested content with simply correcting an error. She must be lavish of that which she had withheld. She must bestow all the treasures in her store to make up for having ever been unduly careful of them. So now, the treasure of her love unlimited—of her confidence supreme and unques-

tioning—spent itself on this silent, gloomy Vaughan Hesketh. There was no test which her trust would not have withstood, just then. His silence, his gloom, were only natural—and only called forth the more her tender wish to comfort and to cheer. Therefore she talked on as she had been used to do when his looks gave fond reply to her free, artless prattling—when his gay laugh, his caressing tone, had told of his own delight in listening. Now, he leaned his head upon his hand, and only an occasional glance, or brief ejaculation attested that he heard. Once he broke in with an abrupt question.

"You have had no visiters, I suppose, at Redwood?"

"Two or three called, but I did not see them. Miss Kendal has been."

"Of course she has," muttered Vaughan, between his teeth. Then he seemed to plunge into deep thought, from which he roused himself as if by an effort. His face took a gentler expression, a smile began to dawn. "And how is Miss Kendal?" he asked.

"Very well indeed. She seems very happy at Beacon's Cottage, with her little pupils."

"I am glad to hear it—I am very glad to hear it," pronounced Vaughan, settling his feet on the fender, and folding his arms, meditatively. Caroline looked up, surprised and glad, but said nothing. "I have heard some things of Miss Kendal," he pursued, after a pause, "which have greatly altered my opinion of her. Whilst I was in London, I happened to meet a—a person who knew a good deal about her."

"How strange! Ah! Vaughan, I'm so glad."

He did not look at her, though her eyes were raised to his face, with their rare, dewy lustre shining in them. He was gazing fixedly into the fire.

"But who is the person?" was her next question. "Who is it that knows Miss Kendal?"

"Why, I happened to meet at a friend's house a Madame de Vigny."

"Oh, I know!" cried Caroline, in glee. "She is a niece of Lady Camilla Blair's. She is going to stay with Miss Kendal at Beacon's Cottage. She was to arrive by this evening's train."

"She has arrived," said Vaughan, after a moment's hesitation. "She travelled in the same carriage with myself."

"Did she? How very pleasant! Oh, Vaughan, you can tell me all about her. What is she like?" And Caroline drew her little stool closer to the fender, and arranged herself in an attitude of pleased attention, resting her elbow on her knee, her chin on her hand, with her alert look raised to Vaughan's face. "What is she like? Tell me all about her."

"All about her! How do you suppose I should know 'all about her' in this little time?"

"Well, I mean, all you know. Is she pretty?"

"Yes—I believe she is thought so," said Vaughan, stirring the fire, till the blaze forced Caroline to retreat to a more respectful distance.

"Is she old?" was the next question.

"Old! What do you mean?" he exclaimed, with a hasty glance at her.

"I mean, how old is she?"

"I did not ask her."

"But she is not a girl? She is older than I am?"

"Very possibly."

"And is she pleasant—intelligent? Shall we like her, do you think?"

"I am sure I can't tell," he said, with some impatience; "people's tastes differ so much."

"Then, do *you* like her?" said Caroline, smiling at his caution.

Her smile seemed to annoy him. He rose from his chair, abruptly.

"Oh I like her very well. Don't you think we may go to my uncle's room now?"

So they went. Caroline must perforce reserve her questions for some future opportunity. It did not occur that night. After an hour's desultory conversation with the invalid, Vaughan retired to his own room. As he bade Caroline good-night, he whispered to her, "I'm so wearied, dear, I hardly know what I'm doing, this evening. You must pardon!"

Pardon was radiantly smiled on him. "Poor Vaughan! Dear Vaughan!" was her comment to herself.

Chapter ix.

Vaughan was certainly less "tired" in the morning, as it was only natural and to be expected that he should be. He was vivacious, conversational, gay. If his vivacity was somewhat restless, and his talk more like a refuge from uncomfortable silence than a spontaneous flow of words, Caroline did not detect it.

"Carry, we must go for a walk this morning. I long for a ramble through the pine wood again."

"This morning? Oh, I am so sorry! Did not you hear my uncle beg me to be with him this morning? Indeed, I always sit with him till our early dinner hour."

"And so the best part of the day goes. And it is such a pleasant day, too."

He was veritably beginning to view things *en couleur de rose*. It was a heavy, sombre-clouded

November morning as ever dawned in sluggish mists.

"In the afternoon ——" began Caroline, wistfully.

"You forget, my dear, that in November there is no such season as 'afternoon.' No; a walk on the terrace is the utmost you'll get after two o'clock."

"You must have your ramble alone then. It's a pity; I should have liked it so much."

"I'll tell you what I shall do. I thought we would go together; but it will be quite as well for me to get it over by myself. I'll go and call on Miss Kendal."

"Ah, do!" she cried, eagerly, delighted at his voluntary proposal. "Take her my love, and say I shall come to see her, and make acquaintance with Madame de Vigny, to-morrow, if I can. Perhaps, though, they would come here this evening."

"Oh, don't ask them," said Vaughan, hastily; "let us at least have our evenings to ourselves."

"Unsociable!" smilingly she answered. "If only you would give me a proper description of

the stranger lady, perhaps my impatience might be controlled. But you are as vague and unsatisfactory as—as an oracle."

He glanced at her. She was laughing, in utter simplicity; and he laughed too.

"Well, then, I'll go, and entertain you at dinner-time with an account of my adventures—shall I?"

"That will be charming! I must go to my uncle now. And you will be off to Beacon's Cottage soon I suppose? Good-by!" She was going.

"Stop!" Vaughan cried. She lingered. "I say," he began, with a curious hesitation, "shall I—shall I have to endure the ordeal of—of congratulations and so forth up there? Do they know ——"

She coloured, perhaps because he was looking at her so earnestly.

"I told Miss Kendal," she said, uttering the words quickly, as if not without effort. Vaughan looked away, strode to the window, with his hands in his pockets. However, the next minute he laughed lightly.

"What a fool a man is sometimes! Why should I care? What would it matter to me if all the children in the parish ran after me, calling out, 'He's going to be married?' Eh, Carry?"

"I should say it would be unpleasant, at least. I don't think you need fear any such *éclat.* My uncle did not wish it—our engagement," bravely spoken out, "to be talked over by the neighbourhood; and Miss Kendal, knowing his wish, is the last person to mention the fact again."

"Like himself, like *yourself* too, Carry!" cried Vaughan, with a wonderful flashing of satisfaction on his face. He caught her hand, and kissed it, opened the door for her to pass out, and waved his hand to her, as she went up the stairs.

He went back into the dining-room; he stood, with folded arms, looking, not *seeing*, out at the window, with his brow knit, his mouth compressed in very evident complication of thought. Only for a minute or two, however. Then he was off, walking rapidly along the broad hill-side path, under the forlorn boughs of the almost wintry beeches, with the low, sullen wind wailing round, and the

stern clouds in huge masses looming weightily overhead—on to Beacon's Cottage.

The wind, which was deep-mouthed and heavy as with a subdued malignity, in the valley, was fiercely astir upon the hill. It swung the pine-trees, it shook the crackling oak branches. It came about Vaughan like an enemy who would fain repel him from the gate of that breezy paradise.

But once in-doors, the scene was changed. The maid of whom he inquired for Miss Kendal announced that that lady was then engaged with her pupils. But on his saying he would wait till she was at liberty, he was shown into the drawing-room —a long apartment, with two French windows looking out through the wreathed columns of the verandah, across the broad lawn to the thick shrubberies, and thence over the "dip" of the valley to the wave-like hills beyond. But Vaughan thought the interior of the room more inviting for the gaze to rest upon. *Imprimis*, walls of a pale vague colour, with a slender, graceful twining pattern of leaf-green described thereon. The usual amount

of tables, consoles, chairs, and couches, disposed around; and—provided by Caroline's thoughtful care from the hot-houses at Redwood—more than a usual quantity of flowers on stands at each window. A few prints on the walls, and one large mirror, reflecting back the flowers and alabaster ornaments of the mantelpiece. Carpets and hangings of deep crimson gave a warm tone to the whole. Moreover, and finally, the fire blazed brightly in the polished steel grate, and a little table with writing materials was drawn closely thereto. And a low, gracefully-shaped lounging-chair was placed beside the little table; and in the chair reclined one of the prettiest visions of brilliance, warmth, and colouring, that ever glowed against the dulness of a November day. A vision of small but exquisitely harmonious proportions—of polished, brunette complexion, with a living bloom upon each clear, soft cheek, a living lustre in the dark eyes. While, ever and anon, a ready, sudden smile, intensely radiant, aroused the dimples round the red mouth, till the whole face, vivacious at all times, became wondrously vital, with ardent

life such as is seldom seen on the faces of our northern women. Indeed, there was something exceedingly un-English about the aspect of Madame de Vigny. She *shone* like some rich southern flower. There was a gorgeous taste about all the details of her dress. The attitudes, too, into which she was apt to fall, lounging, graceful, and careless; the voice, a luscious, lingering contralto—all combined to keep up the impression her face created: such an impression of fervid radiance as we have in looking at some tropical bird or blossom.

She looked up, and the flashing smile lightened upon Vaughan as he approached.

"Ah, fellow-traveller!" she cried, the slight foreign accent giving an added piquancy, hardly needed, to the rich voice. And she extended her hand, ivory white, gemmed with rings, and with a cloud of delicate lace falling about it.

Vaughan sprang to receive it; he held it for an instant, while he leaned towards her, with many lowly-uttered words of greeting and of inquiry.

"Not tired at all—oh no! But up here one

feels as if the world hung a mile below—n'est ce pas? and the cold and the wind—ils me font peur!"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively. Then she proceeded to put aside her portefeuille, and drew towards her a dainty mother-of-pearl work-box, from which she extracted a piece of embroidery that might have been achieved in fairyland, it was so aerial. At this she began to work busily, with a pretty importance. Now and then, however, she glanced up from beneath the shadow of her long black eyelashes, on the handsome face of her companion, whose gaze rested upon her with an earnestness that was more than admiring.

"They are all 'at lessons' in there," she proceeded, tossing back her head. "I was counting the time till they should be finished. I was tired of writing my letters, and it is triste to be by one's-self a whole morning. When the wind makes such a noise, too. I am glad you are come." This, with the witch-smile, half-hidden, half-revealed, as she bent over her work.

"You make me very happy," murmured Vaughan,

seizing her gold scissors, and twisting them about in an evident embarrassment and want of ease, most unwonted with him.

"Yes, after Paris and London this is curious—n'est ce pas? I was never in English country before. It is all strange to me. But you told me that it is beautiful about here. Where are they then, these beautiful environs?"

She looked out at the window, and shivered ostentatiously, drew the foot-cushion nearer to her, and deposited her tiny, silken-clad feet upon it.

Vaughan, twirling the scissors, began to tell her of different places in the neighbourhood, which he trusted she would find interesting. "The scenery ——"

"Oh, but at this season, with these winds blowing, one cannot talk or think of scenery. In the summer I shall be charmed to walk about and see things; mais en attendant que d'ennui! If it had not been to see my good gouvernante, I would never have come till summer time."

Vaughan could reply nothing, it seemed. He played with the toy he had chosen, in silence.

"Mille pardons, my scissors!" she cried, rescuing them, not too soon, from their perilous position in his restless fingers. "You must tell me, Mr Hesketh, of the people that live about here? Society—is there no society? Is it all scenery that you have here? It is unhappy for me that I do not love much to walk."

"But do you not ride?"

"Ah, yes. But I have no horse in this place."

"I have—more than one; I need not say how entirely at your disposal."

"Vraiment!" the brilliant smile dazzled him again. "You are very amiable. I delight in riding. I used to ride always at dear Paris."

She sighed at the mention of "dear Paris."

"Are you so attached to Paris?"

"Yes. I was very happy there—always." The last word was uttered after a brief pause, and the transient shade of sentiment which had begun to pass over the speaker's face seemed to be drawn off. She looked up suddenly at Vaughan, and, in quite a new tone, added, "I have to make the acquaintance of Miss Maturin—your cousin. I anticipate very greatly the pleasure. Tell me,

what is she like! Miss Kendal says little of her I fancy she loves her much. Is she so charming?"

"Oh!" and Vaughan muttered, amid much hesitation, that was but partially carried off by his forced air of carelessness, a few words, of which the only ones clearly audible were, "she is very young."

"A charm to begin with—n'est ce pas?" cried the pretty inquisitor, snipping a tiny fragment of cambric with her tiny scissors, and glancing at him as she executed the feat. "Go on."

She settled herself in her chair, with another shrug of her graceful shoulders, and a musically-uttered shiver, deprecatory, *en passant*, of the cold wind that shook the windows every now and then. All her arrangements were made to "listen." She worked on, deftly and busily, and waited for him to begin.

But he did not begin. He had proceeded no further in the code of hesitations than to fling back his hair, with a half-impatient gesture, and then look fixedly on at the embroidering process, when an interruption occurred. Truth to tell, he hardly knew whether he felt it most welcome or most pro-

voking. A troop of children came in, eager, and rather noisy, fresh from lessons. There arose a shrill little chorus.

"We can't go out! Miss Kendal says it's too windy." And then they gathered round their cousin Blanche, with a familiarity which showed how far they had progressed in friendliness, even in a short time. It was pleasant to see the readiness with which the lady lent herself to their small interests; the gaiety with which she immediately set to work to amuse them.

"Too windy! Indeed I should suppose that," she cried, snatching the youngest on her lap, and smiling on them all quite as brilliantly as if they had been a circle of grown-up admirers, duly bearded and moustached. "Did you never hear the story of the little Pierrot, whose hair was blown away up into the moon?"

"No! no! Oh, what was it?" cried the chorus.

"Nor his adventures that befell him as he went to look for his pretty curls?"

"No! Oh, *do* tell us!"

"Asseyez-vous, donc. Doucement. I am going to tell you." And with a swift, laughing glance at Vaughan, she arranged them about her, the quietest little group of earnest auditors possible, and began her narrative.

Vaughan leaned against one of the windows, and looked on: charmed to the utmost, yet fiercely impatient of this monopoly of Madame de Vigny. Nevertheless, his attention was so engrossed, that he was conscious of no entrance, no approach, till a rather deep, equable, quiet voice addressed him, and looking round, he saw Miss Kendal beside him, with her hand extended. He started at first, it was so odd to see her once-familiar face again. Then he grasped her hand with considerable show of cordiality. He was delighted to see her, to greet her as a neighbour; it was quite pleasant, her coming to live so near Redwood, he averred.

"Yes," said the lady, calmly, after her manner, and at the same time looking at him with the old look, unobtrusive, yet inexorably searching, which he had used to hate so much, and did not precisely love just now. "How is your uncle this morning?"

"Better, we hope," he replied, dauntlessly; not knowing, or not remembering, anything about it.

"And Caroline?"

"Very well—as usual."

"I fancied she looked wearied, and that the roses were faded a little, yesterday. She has had a trying time, poor girl."

"She was very sorry—we were both disappointed," said Vaughan, after a brief pause, "that she could not come with me this morning."

"She must not confine herself too much. It is a brave little spirit, that is apt to tax its physical powers overmuch sometimes. It was very good of you to come and see me under the circumstances," added Miss Kendal, with a kindly smile; for she really thought it so. Knowing that she had not formerly been a favourite with the young man, she at once concluded that any extra attention he paid her was for Caroline's sake. But Vaughan suspected a covert sarcasm, and coloured an angry crimson, bit his lip, and turned abruptly to the window, and the beauties of nature. All of which Miss Kendal noted—somewhat to her perplexity.

However, she took her accustomed chair, which happened to be beside the very window where he was standing; drew her workstand towards her, and began knitting, the identical knitting, Vaughan verily believed, that she had always been busy over at Redwood. There was the thick round ball of white cord to be duly placed in her pocket, and there the eternal little square in process of formation. The glancing steel pins presently began to resume their appointed click; it was really nervously like old times, to stand by, and watch, and listen. With that voice, too, sounding so confusingly near, the most musical and most thrilling voice ever attuned to a baby-story.

"And then he went on a long, long way, till he met a great tall man, who had eyes like emeralds. And he looked at him, this man, and he said in a terrible tone ——"

"What do you think of our view?" broke in Miss Kendal's "terrible tone," startling Vaughan again. "We are very proud of being the highest habitation within five miles, birds' nests excepted."

He said something appropriate in reply, contriv-

ing, with difficulty, to steer clear of the gentleman with the emerald eyes. Miss Kendal went on again. She could not quite understand why he so persistently looked out of the window, nor why his usually self-possessed aspect was so embarrassed and disturbed. Shyness was out of the question. She knew him too well to suspect him of such a weakness. Did he wish to make an exit, at once speedy and graceful? Was he anxious to be back to Redwood? It seemed likely. Miss Kendal's keen gaze softened: her knitting needles clashed in a somewhat less defiant and uncompromising manner. She considered within herself how best to give him the opportunity he sought. But while she considered, the silver voice from the fireside claimed his attention.

"Mr Hesketh! do you know some petits contes? They demand another, and I am tired."

Much flattered at her notice, Vaughan turned from his window, and advanced towards the little circle of eager faces, and its bewitching centre. Some awkward afterthought, though, made his approach less graceful than was usual with him. He

even halted midway, to inquire, in a curious, constrained tone, "What he could have the pleasure of doing for Madame de Vigny." At which that young lady looked up, with a momentary, and probably unconscious, elevation of her pretty eyebrows, eloquently testifying to the singularity of the gentleman's deportment.

"For me? Ah! nothing. But you may amuse these children, if you will."

And, apparently taking a mischievous pleasure in his discomfiture, she moved from her seat, disentangled herself from the children, with a kiss to one, and a whispered promise to another, and came and leaned over Miss Kendal and her knitting.

"Do you know, I should like to learn that droll work of yours? One cannot for ever work at broderie. Cela m'ennuie."

"My dear, we shall cure you of that disease in good time," observed Miss Kendal, kindly, as, with her quaint, but irresistibly trust-compelling smile, she looked up into the charming, alluring face. "But I doubt if my 'droll work' would exactly suit you. We shall see."

But here the children came crowding round. Mr Vaughan Hesketh had apparently found himself unequal to the prescribed task of their amusement. He stood, uncomfortably enough, handling some books that were on the table, and every now and then giving furtive glances towards the two ladies. Madame de Vigny bestowed on him a half-imperious, half-reproachful, but wholly fascinating look, as the little troop came about her, with eager demands for "more stories!"

"Ah! I told you I was tired. I can think of no more to tell you just now. But if you like, we will go into the nursery, and play at that game—what do you call it, you petits sauvages?—bat-tel-dor and shut-tel-cock!" Pronouncing the inharmonious syllables very carefully, to the hilarious mirth of the children, Blanche moved, closely followed by them, to the door. There she turned, and with another pretty gesture of imperial *froideur*, she bent an adieu to the much-suffering Vaughan.

The door closed behind her, the laughing voices gradually grew indistinct. Vaughan put down his book, and seated himself from sheer want of know-

ing what to do. He was very ill at ease. We are accustomed to bestow a world of compassion on mental pangs, far less intolerable than the complicated ones in whose bonds he writhed just then. The wind blustered without, the fire crackled within, and Miss Kendal's knitting needles clicked in familiar harmony. Discord rather, to Vaughan's ears. He hated the sound, he longed to escape from it, and from her. But he was one in whom passion, however fierce, almost always instinctively veiled its front to prudence. Self-preservation was with him so radically the first law of his being, that even from himself his well-trained impulses were fenced and guarded round.

So he stayed; and, after a brief silence, re-commenced conversation with Miss Kendal. That lady replied deliberately, with a certain reticence which usually characterised her manner, and kept her eyes fixed on her work, at which she laboured indefatigably the while she spoke. All on a sudden, Vaughan having just finished a rather elaborate exposition of the differences between the climate of England and that of the Continent, Miss Kendal looked him

full in the face, with—"So you knew Madame de Vigny in London?"

Altogether dismayed as he really was by this abrupt and unprovoked assault, he gathered self-possession enough to reply with every appearance of easy courtesy. "I had the pleasure of meeting her at Mrs Bingley's house," he added, after a minute's silence. "She is a very charming person."

"Who? Which? Discriminate your pronouns, I beg," said Miss Kendal, with a louring brow, and an impatient tapping of her foot.

"Both, indeed!" cried Vaughan, with a light laugh. "Mrs Bingley is an old acquaintance; I owe many pleasant hours to her hospitality. Madame de Vigny—I cannot presume to praise."

"She is a pretty creature," Miss Kendal observed, in a milder tone. "I wonder, I shall be curious to see, if she and Caroline will like one another."

Vaughan rejoined promptly that he hoped so. A pause, during which a brilliant idea flashed into the mazes of his busy thoughts, and, for an instant, seemed to illumine their perplexity."

"Caroline, on her side, is almost enthusiastic in her anticipations," he declared; "she is most anxious that Redwood and its neighbourhood should be made as attractive as possible to the new arrival."

And then, by a felicitous progression, he slid to the riding question. He had been telling Madame de Vigny that her desire to ride might be gratified as often as she chose. "Caroline would be delighted to lend her pony, I know. And there are such charming excursions possible, even in this weather."

To all this Miss Kendal only briefly responded. She had addressed herself most sedulously to her work, and tugged away at a knot in the cotton, while her companion talked.

He summed up his argument by a recapitulation of the "charming excursions" in the neighbourhood; the fine points of view—for really the views were, some of them, perfectly magnificent.

"It strikes me," said Miss Kendal, to this, looking at him with a grim smile, "that my visiter is likely to prefer a view of the country from carriage cushions, while this bleak season lasts. You have

probably not yet discerned that she is a luxuriously-reared lady, and has no idea of subjecting herself to hardship, atmospheric or otherwise."

At this point she rose from her seat, and expended a good deal of energy on stirring the fire. Vaughan felt it was an opportunity not to be lost of retiring with a good grace. He took his hat, and advanced towards her to take leave, saying, as he did so, with much apparent indifference, "I only judged from her own words. I beg pardon, if I have been hasty or officious in the matter. And now, when may I tell Caroline that she will see you?"

"Quite uncertain—as soon as I can. You will have a tempestuous walk back," said Miss Kendal, almost complacently. For the rain was driving violently across the hills, and came dashing against the window panes. Surly as she was, she felt compelled to suggest that he should stay till the fierceness of the storm abated. But no; he thanked her; he did not care about the rain. And he finished the sentence to himself, as he strode out of the gate, "Rather be drenched with rain, or bruised

with hail, than remain to be scarified by the sharp edges of such a woman as that!"

And so he bent his head to the blast, and went on his way, with a storm in his heart wilder, perhaps, and more dangerous, than that which raged without.

Miss Kendal stood at her window, and watched his exit from her domain. Her hands were clasped tightly together, her lips compressed themselves emphatically, her eyes shone with their keenest and most piercing light. Two words escaped her, almost passionately uttered, before she was aware—"My Caroline!"

And then another interval of restless thought. From it she turned with alacrity, when Blanche re-entered the room, flushed, and rather dishevelled.

"Ah, those children, ils m'ont presque tuée," she declared, flinging herself into her fauteuil again. "If their dinner-time had not come, I should have been altogether dechirée."

"My dear," said Miss Kendal, in her usual sober tone, "you must not allow them such license. They are good children, but they have high spirits."

"Oh, les pauvres petits, je les aime de plus en plus. I have pleasure in playing with them, ch're madame. Don't deprive me of it, c'est à dire, pendant qu'il fait mauvais temps," she added, with a little yawn. "And truly my cousins are better companions than the visiter of just now."

This was uttered after a pause, and in a tone of pique.

"Indeed! I thought you liked the gentleman."

"Oh, in London he was well enough." She pulled at her apron strings, musingly. "But I suppose one cannot flirt convenablement in the country."

Miss Kendal, in a few terse sentences, expressed her opinion as to the *convenances* of flirting in general, at whatever places or seasons. Madame de Vigny listened with dutiful attention. At the finish, she came close to her monitress, and looked up at her with a coaxing smile.

"Ah! don't be cross with me. Nobody ever is —nobody ever used to be, you remember. I don't mean any harm by my flirting; it is bigger in English than in French, I think. Nobody is frightened of it in France."

Miss Kendal did not appear absolutely convinced by this argument. She looked grave and thoughtful. And her vivacious companion seemed to have caught the infection of her seriousness. She sat silently on the ottoman at Miss Kendal's feet, her pretty face leaning on her hand. At last she looked up with a sigh.

"I could believe I was twelve years old again,—learning my lessons as I used to do. Oh, dear old gouvernante, I wish it was true!"

She laid her cheek against the "dear old gouvernante's" lap. A kind hand was laid on her shining hair. Very kind, loving, yet regretful eyes were bent upon her.

"My dear, the past is for none of us; the present is for all; and it is enough. Take care of it."

Chapter X.

Two or three days afterwards, Madame de Vigny and Miss Kendal called at Redwood. They were shown into the drawing-room. Miss Maturin was with Mr Hesketh, who, the servant said, was not so well as he had been the day before. This was all; but Miss Kendal sighed, and appeared restless, as was her wont when she was seriously troubled. Blanche's light chatter, as she glanced observantly about the room, at the pictures, the statuettes, the books, and music, seemed discordantly out of season. Blanche herself looked almost cruelly brilliant, blooming, and gay, as she stood on tiptoe to examine more nearly a very pretty water-colour sketch of Caroline, executed six or seven years back. She indulged in many little admiring exclamations both in French and English, and finally turned to Miss Kendal.

"Oh! your Caroline must be vraiment belle comme un ange. I wish she would come."

"Moderate your expectations," said the elder lady, in her most laconic manner. "She is not at all like an angel, and still less comme un ange."

The door opened, but it gave entrance, not to the expected Caroline, but to Vaughan. Of him, so soon as the usual greetings were over, Miss Kendal precipitately inquired particulars regarding his uncle. His tone was far more satisfactory than the servant's had been. The invalid had not slept quite so well, but was otherwise as usual. The doctor was now with him.

"And Caroline?"

"Pretty well. She looks pale and tired sometimes; she is such an indefatigable nurse."

So far Vaughan had acquitted himself faultlessly. His air was easy and courteous: his voice had the precise inflection of seriousness, and no more, that was suitable to the tenor of the words. The shade of gravity still subdued his face as he turned to Madame de Vigny with some more indifferent remark. Evidently he was master of himself for the

time. He had been taking into rigorous discipline those rebellious, vagrant feelings which had nearly betrayed him. With desperate bravery he even dared to encounter the same power which had vanquished him awhile before. Fearlessly, he seated himself near the syren, looked at her, listened to her, conversed with her. It was perilous. The very atmosphere that surrounded Blanche de Vigny was one of witchery, most alluring and enchanting; and the alloy of sophistication, which, to many men, would have been an antidote to the charm of all the rest, was not so to Vaughan. Perhaps his instinct was not subtle enough to detect it, perhaps his taste was not sufficiently refined to object to it. Be that as it may, Madame de Vigny, with her dainty prettiness, her finished grace and elegance, her fascinations without number, was to Vaughan Hesketh absolutely and imperiously irresistible. By every turn of her head, every dimple in her cheek, every varied glance of her dark eyes—now shy, now saucy, now half-averted, and again turned full upon him in bewildering radiance; by every smallest gesture, or

movement, she drew him to her as by a glamour most potent and most tyrannical. He had not sat beside her five minutes before the chains were writhing about him. He had neither the strength nor the desire to escape from them. Every other consideration gave way to the one selfish, and, therefore, sufficing delight of looking at her, basking in her smiles, yielding to the delirious magic of her presence.

To be sure, there was no immediate demand made upon his prudence. Miss Kendal was poring over some old books at a side table, and, as for the conversation that was passing between himself and Madame de Vigny, the whole world might have taken notes of it, without at all disconcerting either of them. But, when Caroline entered, the state of affairs changed. Madame de Vigny rose, and eagerly advanced towards her. Miss Kendal was beforehand, however, and already held her old pupil by the hand. A very informal introduction took place, and the young girl and the brilliant woman greeted each other cordially and kindly.

But poor Caroline! she stood facing her new acquaintance, admiring with enthusiastic and innocent delight her beauty and grace. Quite unmindful, quite unconscious of herself, poor, worn, and wind-blown wild-flower, she gazed on the attractions of this perfectly-cultivated, luxuriously-cared-for blossom, and never thought how its brilliance made herself look doubly faded and forlorn. For, truly, she was both. Undue confinement to the house, and the continuous though hardly recognised weight of care and responsibility, had stolen the roses from Carry's fresh cheek, had subdued the brightness of her smile, and had left dark marks, as of fatigue or exhaustion, under her eyes. Her dress, too—more adapted for a sick chamber than for the drawing-room—lacked all the grace and exquisite finish of the other's. Madame de Vigny's silk robe, with its delicate embroidered trimming, her velvet and miniver, the innumerable little charming *agremens* of her toilet, put out of countenance Caroline's plain and plainly-fashioned merino dress, with its simple collar, and skirt innocent of flounces.

But nothing could alter the true, sweet, frank nature, which, alike independent of physical ailment, as of external and adventitious aids, shone from her face, and was eloquent in her voice and manner. Her honest admiration of Madame de Vigny was sufficiently evident, and the lady, spoiled beauty though she was, could hardly be insensible to its pleasant flattery. Besides, all the better and more real sympathies of her own nature were at once attracted to Caroline. So they "made friends," as the children say, at once; while Vaughan bit his lip in silence, as he looked on, and Miss Kendal waited contentedly for a future opportunity of private conference with her favourite.

Caroline herself was the first to make it. Leaving her new acquaintance examining a volume of music at the pianoforte, she came to Miss Kendal, and leaned over her chair.

"My uncle heard you were here. He had a long letter this morning which seemed to trouble him. He grew quite white, and seemed angry. But he did not tell me anything about it. Perhaps

he will tell you. He begged you would not go away without seeing him."

"I will go at once, my dear."

Vaughan, engaged in watching Madame de Vigny, and in listening to the faint sotto voce in which she was singing to herself as she looked over the music—Vaughan heard nothing of this brief snatch of dialogue. He was rather surprised to see Miss Kendal leave her chair, and, leaning on Caroline caressingly, walk down the long room to the door, deep in low-voiced talk. Then Miss Kendal disappeared, and Caroline came back to the pianoforte, and to the fair student, who still bent over her book, and hummed her little tunes to herself, in the same dainty sotto voce as before.

They resumed their talk. Vaughan leaned back on his sofa, watched them, but interfered not. Once or twice, Caroline, out of the fulness of her heart, smiled at him a bright smile of exultation. It was a new pleasure that she was enjoying, and, after so long a season of much loneliness and anxiety, it came with refreshing zest. But Vaughan could not command himself to answer her smile;

he sat, dull, and apparently impassive, only speaking when appealed to, as he was sometimes, though rarely, by Madame de Vigny.

But the musical discussion was at an end. Blanche moved from the piano to the window. Would Miss Maturin venture out on the terrace? It looked so pleasant, and she wanted to make acquaintance with the Redwood gardens, of which she had heard so much from Mr Hesketh.

"Oh, Vaughan, we must show Madame de Vigny the new American plants in the greenhouse!" cried Caroline. "Let us go at once."

Her blitheness might have won some answering gaiety from a less apathetic spirit than Vaughan's appeared to be at present. He accompanied them, however, opened doors, and shut gates, with all due attention; but still the conversation was chiefly supported by the ladies. Caroline, eager in her search after the choicest flowers to enrich the bouquet she was forming, ran to another greenhouse, leaving the others gazing on the lingering glories of some gorgeous tropical plant. Then Madame de Vigny turned her swift glance from

the flower, and, looking up in her companion's face, "Qu' elle est joyeuse, your cousin! But when she first came in, she looked so sad and tired; and she is pale still."

She watched her, with evident curiosity and some interest. Vaughan, in turn, looked at the watcher. From her he glanced at Caroline. The contrast was striking. Now that she was no longer talking—now that the brief flush of change and pleasurable excitement had passed from her face as from her mind, a grey and heavy shade subdued her—body and spirit. The old care reasserted its dominion, and weighed her down. She stood, arranging her flowers, under the drooping branches of the silver-birch, with the sombre line of firs rising behind, and above them the autumn clouds, ponderous, and of a dull purple colour, that fitly harmonised with the rest of the picture. Poor Carry! her very step, as she came towards them again, had lost its temporarily-recovered buoyancy. It was time for her to go in again. Some particular medicine had to be administered to the patient, who loved best to re-

ceive it from her hands; and the stable clock striking the hour had brought back to her, as by magic, all the atmosphere of weariness and gloom, which for awhile she had almost forgotten. She could only stay to bestow her bouquet, to shake hands with the radiant Blanche, and, with a parting smile, very sweet, and as cheerful as she could make it, to Vaughan, she left them.

"Oh, I am so sorry she is gone," said Madame de Vigny, turning to her companion. He made no reply; and presently, with a smile and a half bow, sufficiently expressive, she added, "I like her *very* much. She is fair, she is sweet, she is bien gracieuse. Je vous en félicite, Mr Hesketh."

Mr Hesketh retained presence of mind enough to bow in acknowledgment. But his companion laughed gaily and archly in his face.

"You were very retenu. You never said a word, but you see I have divined your secret. Do you know how? Can you guess?"

He could not guess. He presumed, in a very deep and rather sullen tone, that she had been informed.

"Oh, you do wrong to my cleverness," she averred. "No, indeed; I had my suspicions from the first, it was so natural a thing—so likely. And when you began to speak, c'est à dire, *not* to speak, of 'your cousin, Miss Maturin,' I was sure. And so, je vous fais mes complimens."

Silence. They were pacing the broad terrace-walk, at rather a brisk rate. Vaughan's eyes studied the ground with persistency. The lady, alert and gay as a bird, looked around her with airy grace. Suddenly, she turned to him with a question.

"And when—when shall you be married? It is not indiscreet to ask?"

"Yes, it is indiscreet for you to ask; it would be dangerous for me to answer," he returned, hoarsely. He looked up; he let her see his face, very pale, and with a lightning-like flame in the eyes that fixed themselves on her. "I am miserable! You must know it—you must see it," he muttered, beneath his breath. Apparently his companion did not hear. "I cannot tell you more—now," he went on; "some day, perhaps!" A passionate

ejaculation, a call—how meaningless! how mocking!—on a Name that he had no right to invoke then, at least. And Vaughan Hesketh strode fiercely and quickly from her side. Only for a few minutes, to pluck, apparently, a spray of myrtle that grew near. He came back to her, and began to talk in a totally changed tone. Did she not like the gardens? Were not the evergreens cheerful, though the other trees were now almost leafless? The myrtle, too, it was flourishing yet, it grew in such a sheltered spot. Might he offer her the spray he had just gathered?

Madame de Vigny disliked *scènes*. She had been startled and somewhat annoyed by Vaughan's sudden air of tragedy, although she was quite prepared to understand its drift. But she preferred the lighter atmosphere, the superior *convenances* of comedy. She accepted his offering with the lightest grace, the sweetest smile in the world.

"Mille remercimens. I hope nothing troubles you? I should be very sorry."

"Would you?"

Something in his tone smote the heart of the

woman; for she had one, though thickly incrusted with worldliness, love of admiration, vanity in all forms. Perhaps, too, for the first time, the thought of Caroline in her relation to Vaughan came across her mind. Howbeit, she drew back, without looking at him; she flung away the myrtle.

"It is old and brown. Je ne l'aime pas. Do you think Miss Kendal is ready to go home?"

Not waiting for a reply, she slid past him, with something of stateliness in her erect little figure. They had come into the garden by the study-window; it was still open, and she walked swiftly towards it. Vaughan followed close, but she would not see his hand extended to assist her up the step. She sprang in; she hardly paused in the room, but went at once to the door leading to the hall.

There Vaughan detained her.

"I have not displeased you? I am not so doubly, trebly miserable as that? Give me one word."

"Mr Hesketh, vous me faites de chagrin. Permit that I pass."

"Tell me, at least ——" He paused, as she

flashed on him a glance of sparkling indignation. He grew desperate. His passions slipped from their control. "Have pity on me—for I love you. I love *you!*" he cried. "Hear me—I swear to you ——"

But she turned from him, determinedly. "Silence, monsieur: you have no right to speak to me in this manner. I *shall* pass."

In good time sounded Miss Kendal's voice in the hall. Blanche opened the door, closed it behind her with energy, and joined her friend. She was a clever little person, and able to disguise her emotions to perfection.

"We have been walking on the terrace; it is so pleasant. I hurried away when I heard you call."

Miss Kendal, preoccupied herself, scarcely heeded either the words or the aspect of the speaker. Had she done so, she might have penetrated beneath the apparent ease, howsoever skilfully assumed. But she led the way to the pony-chaise, which awaited them, with compressed lips and thoughtful eyes.

Blanche made one or two remarks as they drove

off, to which she received very abstracted replies. At last she asked, "Mr Hesketh—the old gentleman—is he better?"

Then, as if the spring of her meditations had been touched, Miss Kendal turned quickly, looked her blooming companion full in the face, said, "I have talked with him for the last time, I believe. Poor Caroline!"

No more. The lips were compressed again. Madame de Vigny averted her head without reply, and the silence continued unbroken till they reached home.

Chapter xi.

Vaughan Hesketh, issuing from the study some half-hour afterwards, met Dr Barclay and the physician from London descending the stairs into the hall. Both looked grave at the sight of him, and, after an awkward pause of hesitation, Dr Barclay took him aside. "I think it well to tell you—that—that Sir —— has just seen your uncle. He thinks (as I feared before) that a few days must terminate all. Nothing more can be done"

He was unaffectedly shocked. He had not thought his uncle's illness so serious.

The doctor went on, "Miss Maturin guesses nothing of the truth. She should be told—at once. It is impossible to say ——"

But the great London physician waxed impatient over this consumption of his golden minutes, and the other was compelled to break off and follow him.

Vaughan was left, standing at the foot of the wide staircase, to enter into the newly-created chaos of his thoughts, and to reduce it to order as he best might. He passed in review as calmly as he could—and he was sufficiently calm now to calculate chances and probabilities—all the circumstances of his position. His uncle, he knew, had executed the will by which Redwood descended to him; but he knew well, also, that the property had been thus bequeathed in full reliance on the approaching union of Caroline and himself. Should any suspicion occur to the old man, Vaughan reflected, that aught stood in the way of that union, or that his love for the young girl was less than he fondly believed it to be, it would not be too late even then to alter the will—to his utter confusion and ruin. But then, what was it that the doctor had but just now informed him? . . . . The guilty exultation throbbed at his heart for an instant, but if he could not quite banish it thence, he veiled it over decently; for it shocked his taste, if it failed to wound his conscience. And he paced up and down the broad hall, his eyes bent on the

floor, muttering to himself that it was a cursed turn of fate. He wished to Heaven (in the vain *parlance* of one who never thought of, nor believed in, that which he adjured) that things had happened otherwise.

And thus he thought, calculated, and planned, and five minutes—or it might have been an hour—had fled by, when a light rustling in the corridor at the head of the stairs disturbed him, and Caroline's voice called him—"Vaughan, I was about to fetch you. Please come. My uncle is certainly better—he is sitting up. He would like to see you."

He hardly seemed to understand; she had to repeat the words. She looked so smiling and glad in her good news:—something of the old happiness and careless grace was visible in her for the minute. She waited. He could do nothing but ascend the stairs to her side. She looked up at him with eyes dewy in thankfulness. She slipped her hand in his, poor child, in happiest, most confiding faith. The new joy took her unawares, and made her unwontedly demonstrative.

"Vaughan, I am sure he is better."

He replied something vague and not very audible about "the doctors."

"They have just gone. Did you see them? Did they say anything to you? They said not a word to me, except that he might get up if he liked. So they *must* think him stronger."

There was an earnestness in her tone, as of a yearning beginning to be felt—a yearning after corroboration and confirmation of her own hopes. But they were in the sick-room now.

The old man was leaning back in his great chair. There was a light in his eye, an animation in his face, quite enough to account for Caroline's glad hopes; but his voice was very weak and faint; his attitude showed painful feebleness. The revivification was, after all, more mental than physical. He beckoned them towards him. Caroline was at his side instantly, leaning over the arm of his chair with her soft cheek touching his withered, wrinkled brow. Vaughan advanced more deliberately. He took his uncle's hand; in a low, indistinct voice he uttered all he could find to say. Then, in obe-

dience to the invalid's gesture, he seated himself beside him.

Mr Hesketh looked from one to the other; at Vaughan perplexedly—at Caroline with more than usual love and thoughtfulness. "My child—my dear child!" he said, many times over, keeping close hold of her hand, and pressing it in his fond clasp. Caroline, oppressed, she hardly knew why, by the unusual tenderness of his tone, stopped his lips with her quick, loving kiss. Then she began stroking his thin hand, trying not to see how very thin it had become. With a resolute effort she turned to his face again, and resumed for the time something of her olden gaiety.

"You are brave and strong to-day; I think it is Miss Kendal who does you so much good. I am jealous of Miss Kendal—she interferes with my prerogative. I am your nurse; it is I that should make you better."

"And so you do—so you have always done, my queen—my bird—my darling!" murmured he, lavishing on her all the pet names he had been used to give her. But a restless look began to

appear in his face. He put his hand to his forehead, as if trying to recall something he only half-remembered.

"Miss Kendal—Elizabeth Kendal—is a good woman, Caroline; I think she will always—always ——" There he broke off.

Vaughan looked at him earnestly, and with a slight shade of alarm in his earnestness. "I am afraid, dear uncle, you have been talking too much this morning," he said, in a soothing, careful tone. "Perhaps you will be better if you are left quiet for a time?" He half rose from his seat as he spoke, but the old gentleman detained him.

"No, no; I am quite fit—quite ready. I am going to be a man of business again for this afternoon," he said, with a new gleam in his looks, as having at last touched the right spring of recollection. "I am going to look over papers and deeds with my lawyer. Mr Clayton is to be here at three o'clock, Caroline. Order that he is shown up to me at once."

Both his companions were startled by this intelligence. Vaughan felt a sudden shock of dismay;

a sudden and imperative call upon all his prudence, caution, and cleverness. Caroline disliked the idea of law business, because she feared the effect of mental fatigue on the invalid. A second thought as to the possible nature of these legal arrangements made her colour deeply, and busy herself in arranging cushions and footstool, so as to avert her face from Vaughan, and then she went to the other end of the room for the invalid's cooling draught. There was no need for her to do so—he was not looking at *her*—he was looking at his uncle, wondering, speculating, calculating perhaps.

"I suppose, dear sir, your law business cannot be delayed?"

"Why should it be delayed?" the old gentleman asked, with almost sharp eagerness, turning a curiously-earnest, almost alarmed look on the young man.

"Only that it is likely to tire you so much; and if you could rest to-day ——"

"My dear Vaughan, it is not well to take rest till we have done what remains to do," Mr Hesketh said, with a feeble sort of dignity, infinitely

pathetic to note. "I have been easy too long—idle too long. I will set all in order now. You know ——" He looked in the young man's face, and suddenly became excited. "Vaughan—Vaughan! did you tell me the truth, and *all* the truth? By heaven! I could not rest—I will not suffer a chance ——" But there he grew confused, and again paused.

"Dear sir, be calm, I beg of you. This needless agitation will harm you," Vaughan said, soothingly. His soft voice and composed manner betrayed nothing of his great inward perturbation.

The old man looked at him again, with a piteous sort of doubt and apprehension.

"I am not satisfied—I am not clear in my mind," he kept feebly repeating. "I must see Clayton."

"My dear uncle, it is not possible you can doubt—I beseech you to remember ——"

"Yes, yes; I want to be just—to be just. I must make all plain, and sign that will. It is the best, the most rightful way—eh, Vaughan?"

"Whatever you think best, sir," he returned, submissively. His heart bounded with a sense of

relief—of exultation. With a degree of fatuity that even the shrewdest are sometimes liable to, he took it for granted that *the will* could only be that one by which Redwood descended to himself.

Mr Hesketh resumed—"Therefore, when Clayton comes ——"

"Oh, don't talk about these things now! Vaughan, don't let him weary himself," cried Caroline, anxiously coming forward.

But Vaughan hurriedly whispered to Caroline that it was not well to thwart him, if he wished to speak of "these things." And then, seeing that the invalid leaned back in his chair, thoughtful and silent, he bent towards him, as inviting his further communications.

"Caroline, did you tell them that Mr Clayton was to be shown here—to my uncle—at once?" Vaughan presently asked.

She gravely assented.

Mr Hesketh looked up, with the peculiar start as of something suddenly remembered. "Yes, my pet, tell them again! I have something to say to—to you," he said, turning to Vaughan, while

Caroline went to the bell. "You know—it is well to make it quite clear—about Redwood. You will be satisfied?"

"My dear uncle," he replied, fervently, a flush of colour coming to relieve the apprehensive pallor of his face, "can you doubt—can you question?"

"That is well—that is well;" and Mr Hesketh returned the pressure of his hand. "So, when I see my two children happy," he wandered on, "for they love one another—they love one another, Miss Kendal ——" But the utterance of the name set him right. He looked up, with a half smile of courteous apology. "I forgot—I forgot. I think I am tired. Children, come here a minute. Stand there—just there—side by side. Nay, sweet, you are not frightened?" For Caroline was trembling, partly from nervous anxiety, partly from shyness. But Vaughan took her hand, and whispered to her reassuringly. He put his arm around her.

"You love her, Vaughan?" said the old man, looking at him straightly and fixedly. The gaze of those eyes, curiously bright, intensely earnest,

smote the young man like a sharp weapon. He winced; the blood seemed to career madly up into his brain. He felt blinded—dizzy for the moment. But conscience held but a brief dominion. He had gathered himself together anew in another instant, cool, calm, and collected; he drew the girl closer to his heart, and bent down and kissed her brow. "I love her!" said he; and Carry, altogether broken down by a tumult of emotions, both sad, painful, and sweet, drooped her head on to his arm, and cried quietly. For a little while Mr Hesketh looked at them both. He clasped within his own their joined hands.

"I have said 'God bless you' many a time, without thinking for *whose* blessing it was I asked. But now, I think I know better what it means. God bless you; I suppose no one deserves his blessing. But try ——" The low, musing tone faded into silence.

Never before had Mr Hesketh spoken with such solemnity on such a subject. Caroline was awed. Vaughan felt embarrassed; he thought it was time for this scene to end. He was relieved when

Caroline gently disengaged herself from his arm, and ran to the door to answer a low-tapped summons. "It is Mr Clayton," she said, coming back to them.

The old gentleman raised himself in his chair. "I am ready—I am ready," he called out, impatiently. "Bid him come."

Vaughan, equally impatient, turned to leave the room.

"Yes," the invalid went on, with nervous haste, "you and Caroline can go, but tell Mr Clayton ——"

Here Mr Clayton entered, followed by a clerk with a deed-case. Caroline and Vaughan passed together down the stairs.

"Oh, I wish—I wish that man had not come. I wish we could have persuaded him to rest and be quiet for to-day. I know he will suffer afterwards."

"We have done all we could," said Vaughan, in a far more philosophical tone. "Opposition would but have irritated him. It is useless to fret, my dear Caroline."

"He was so much better."

"Those sudden improvements are generally treacherous—we must not rely too much ——" the young man began, cautiously.

But Caroline's quick alarm was aroused. She turned to him with a blanched cheek. "Vaughan, oh, Vaughan! what do you mean?"

"Don't be so terrified. I only mean—I mean we must not be too sanguine. It is always well to be prepared for *all* possibilities. Don't you understand?"

Yes, she understood. The full tide of consciousness came in with one great, overwhelming wave. It did not need the addition of Vaughan's rapid communication of what the doctor had said to him. But he told her all.

"Did he say—no hope?" then she faltered.

"No hope."

For an instant she stood motionless as stone, then, putting her hands out as if for guidance, she tottered into the study, and with a blank, hapless look around her, sunk upon a chair. There she sat, looking so white and strange, that Vaughan,

in much confusion and bewilderment, looked about in a vague search for he knew not what of restorative efficacy. He found none such thing, but instead, on the floor by the window, he picked up a dainty little scarf, of some fine, fairy-like texture, embroidered in gold. A faint odour of otto-of-roses yet lingered about it. Had there been no other clue to its ownership, that might have decided it. But Vaughan knew at once from whose neck it had dropped. His thoughts whirled back to their old rioting ground. He clutched it eagerly; he gazed at it madly; then, after the first minute, he remembered, and glanced round at Caroline. She was sitting with her face buried in her hands. He thought she was weeping. He did not hear her voice, faintly, feebly calling his name. He was unmindful of everything, for the time, except of his new-found treasure, and all that was connected with it. She called him again, after a little while; then he came to her side, with some muttered words, the sense of which she failed to catch. Her poor, pale face looked pitiful, indeed—the eyes were distended and heavy, with the oppres-

sion of a wo that could find no tears; the lips were white—they moved tremulously, but made no utterance. With a sudden, sharp sob, she stretched her arms to Vaughan, as if in entreating, blind reliance upon him for help, strength, and comfort. Better had she put her trust in some Egyptian or Hindoo deity of wood or stone. That, at least, would not betray, though it failed to aid. But the idolatries of these civilised days are lavished on what is frailer than wood, harder than stone, while deaf and obtuse, it may be, as either.

Vaughan Hesketh was perfectly capable, had he so chosen, of assuming the semblance of the very tenderness for which poor Carry's desolate heart was yearning. *Had he so chosen*—but he felt not the slightest inclination thereto; and inclination was the guiding rule of his actions, as self-gratification was their aim and end.

Therefore, he only took her hands in his, and led her to the sofa. "Lie down—you are quite overcome." And he stood over her for a minute, suggesting calm, composure, and such popular prescriptions, in the hard, dry tone of a philoso-

pher, or a stoic, or a man of the world. He might have been either, or all of these, as he stood there, uttering his sedative sentences at stated intervals. But Caroline saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing of the hollowness and mocking unreality of his looks, gestures, and tones. He was Vaughan —she loved him—she believed in him. In such a woman's nature, faith and love spring from the self-same root—they have their being and growth together—they fade and fall together. She *could* not doubt, because she loved him. She trusted, as she loved, with her whole heart. No little thing would have power to shake either the confidence or the love.

She had pressed her face against the hand that held her own. She was quite still, quite silent, till presently she raised her face, and suffered her eyes to give a long wandering gaze round the room, at the familiar objects on every side, and the old man's especial chair that was placed opposite to her. Then something smote at her heart, and would not be denied. Long-drawn sobs heralded the passionate burst of tears that at once relieved

and exhausted her. When they were spent, she sank back among the sofa-cushions, wearily, hopelessly.

"That is right," said Vaughan, in approbation; "rest yourself for a little while. Perhaps you could sleep?"

She shook her head.

"Try; it will do you good. *Do* try," he said, anxiously; for in truth he began to feel perplexed. He had a good deal to think of—to do, perhaps—and much time had been wasted already.

"My uncle," said the pale, quivering lips; "he will want me, Vaughan, presently."

"But you had far better recruit your own strength first."

"Ah! no; don't ask me, dear Vaughan. I must go—I cannot bear to be away."

She moved restlessly from her reclining position.

"You must not go to him now, at least—Mr Clayton is still with him," said Vaughan, hastily.

"I forgot," she murmured, with a slight shudder of painful recollection. "That is why, then, he

was so anxious for him to come. Oh, Vaughan—Vaughan! I cannot understand—I cannot believe ——"

"I must insist on your lying down and keeping quiet. Nay, Carry, for my sake, you must," he urged; his manner passing at once from authority the most cold, to tenderness the most persuasive. "I will come and tell you when they have gone; then you shall do as you like, but don't stir now."

She closed her eyes obediently, only whispering he was to be sure and tell her.

"Of course I will. I'll go and keep watch now." He pressed her hand, and was presently gone from the room.

She lay, patient and contented with his promise; but no sleep could come to those aching eyes, no repose could be tasted by that overwrought spirit. Her first sorrow stared her in the face; she had need to study its aspect, to make acquaintance with it as she best could. Darkly it loomed before her—icily its breath came upon her heart. Death was a dreadful visitant. She remembered dimly her only experience of it. Her own child-

ish shrieks of agony, as they tore her from the bed whereon lay what had been her mother, rang in her ears. Her own words she had often remembered since—"I shall never see her any more! I shall never see her any more!" They set themselves to a sort of chant, to which she could not choose but listen, albeit it was terrible to her. It seemed the very utterance of despairing bereavement—and so it was. It is true that the mechanical phrase of appeal for divine help rose more than once to her lips, but the cry of her heart went not so high. The living faith was not lodged in heaven, and in this hour of darkness and of trial it went hardly with her. The instinctive consolation to which she turned was in Vaughan—Vaughan's love, Vaughan's care. Yet somehow she was cruelly conscious that even that fell short—it failed to give even a temporary peace. She felt infinitely desolate—we can all tell after what sort. Night had come to her world, and the false earthly light failed to illumine the darkness. In its shadow she vainly struggled for strength—for calm. Then presently came to her the thought of her

mother, whose face, but faintly remembered at other times, now rose before her, distinct in its pale, worn beauty. Alas! there was no peace written there. From parent to child had descended the conventional husk of semblance—the thing that was to stand to them in place of religion. The outward sign of an absent spiritual grace, that was all! How many have such, and only such! God's pity light on them when the hour of trouble comes! And truly we know that it doth.

Caroline lay there a long time—her hands pressed to her eyes, as if she could so shut out some of the pain that was racking her heart. The November twilight began to close in, and when she at length aroused herself, she was startled to perceive how late it must be. She looked at her watch—she had been lying there two hours. Mr Clayton must surely be gone now, yet Vaughan had not come to her. She was perplexed, and when a servant came in to say Mr Hesketh had been asking for her, she rose with a pang of mingled remorse and anxiety.

"Where is Mr Vaughan?"

"In his room, miss, I believe," the man replied.

"He grieves, and he will not let me see," was her thought; and the idea of his grief was to her so touching, so pathetic, that the tears fell freely, and her own sorrow grew for the time less harsh and galling.

Yet when she entered into the sick chamber, and saw, with the new vision given by the sad, heavy consciousness of coming wo, the familiar face, the beloved grey head, then it was hard for Caroline to maintain an outside calm above that surging sea of passionate emotion, that seemed to choke her brain and deafen her ears. However, she summoned self-control. She stood beside him, leaned over him, spoke lovingly and quietly. And he was not now quick-sighted to see what in former times he would have detected at once—the livid pallor of her face—the occasional convulsive trembling of her figure, as she hung about him.

"I am content now, my queen," he said to her, with an almost exulting smile. "I have finished what I had to do; I may rest now."

"That is right. Are you tired?" she compelled herself to say.

"Yes—no. No, I am not tired. I feel better, I think."

She replied nothing to this. She saw that in the very utterance of the last words a deep, solemn thoughtfulness had come over him. From it he aroused, to draw her with his feeble hands closer towards him; and when she knelt down beside him in her accustomed familiar attitude, he stroked her hair with the old caressing tenderness. Now, it seemed to break her heart in twain; but bravely she commanded herself. She answered him when he spoke, as nearly as she could in her usual cheerful tone. He asked her to read to him. She rose alertly, went to the table whereon were scattered various books. His eyes followed her.

"No, child, none of those. On the stand by the window you will see a large book—read to me out of that."

Caroline reached it down with a sort of awe. In that house the Bible was no familiar friend—no well-loved, often-sought adviser and comforter. It

was but the text-book of certain formulas and conventional observances—nothing more. All beyond that, was vague mystery—unsatisfying, unreal.

There are two classes of humanity whose shortcomings cry loudly for the mercy of God:—professing Christians, who evade the putting into practice of their belief, and those, far fewer, far rarer, who, while mysteriously blind to the faith, live the *life* of the followers of Christ.

Mr Hesketh had been one of these last. His past, blameless before men, had been but lifeless, dry, withered, and rotten, as regarded all higher aims and aspirations. Upright, honourable, benevolent, and even capable of acts of self-denial not generally habitual to the practice of many a believer—he was all this, and yet—what a world was wanting! He had perhaps felt the want, many a time—what man would not?—but his life had been singularly free from those great crises which come to some of us like electric flashes, revealing at once the nothingness of earth—the might and the glory of heaven. A great sorrow is sometimes

needed to teach a man the whole meaning of his life. Human hearts are touched in divers ways; some, it would seem, are only to be smitten like rock—blasted into fragments—"earth undone," before they can be "God-satisfied."

But now—the unrealities of life were fading like shadows from before the old man's eyes, and something lay beyond—something to which he had been blinded before. Yearningly he sought and tried to grasp it. Not Dives praying for a little water to cool the tip of his tongue longed more earnestly than the weak, enfeebled invalid, the sometime indifferent doubter—too indifferent, indeed, to be rightly termed a sceptic—longed now to search into the truth, truth that he had been content to carelessly pass by all his life. For verily, though men may deliberately live without God, they cannot—*cannot* prepare to die without Him.

And so it came to pass that Caroline, sitting on her low stool at her uncle's feet, with the Great Book spread open on her lap, read therefrom, read words that have been as healing waters of conso-

lation to thousands of torn and bruised hearts—words that have lent strength to the helpless, courage to the weak, patience to the restless and the heart-sick.

After about an hour that her low voice had sounded gently on the quiet of the sick room, the old man laid his hand on her shoulder—"Rest now, my pet. Put out the lamp."

She did so, and then resumed her place. He leaned back in his chair, with closed eyes, meditating many new and strange things. The fire-light flickered on his face—on the silver hair—the pale, closed eyelids—the thin lips, that ever and anon moved restlessly, as in some mute utterance of the thoughts that possessed him.

The flame-light flashed, too, on the figure of Caroline, who leaned her head between her two hands, and looked fixedly into the red heart of the fire. Her face also was very pale—the lines of the mouth were more rigid than was natural to them, and the eyes—Carry's clear, steadfast, fearless eyes!—were cloudy with a kind of intent searchingness.

It might have been a long or a short time that had elapsed while the old man and the young girl each sat still and silent. But at length Mr Hesketh spoke in a tone that startled her, it was at once so distinct and so tremulous—"Caroline! teach me—teach me a *prayer*."

She looked up at him almost wildly; then she drooped her head, hid her face, clasping her hands tightly before it. The cry of her newly-stirred heart arose—a yearning, entreating cry—from the very depths of the agony of a vague remorse, remorse she hardly knew for what, but none the less rending and terrible. Was it only now, that for the first time in all her life, the desire, the longing *to pray* came upon her, to be thus strangely echoed? The set words of many a prayer familiar to her lips rose to them, but her heart rejected them all. The sense of her ignorance, her impotence, her unworthiness, overwhelmed her—ay, and saved her.

"Caroline!" entreated the tremulous voice again.

It could not—must not be denied. But faint,

low, so that the listener bent his head to catch the accents, came the first utterances.

"Our Father—Our Father, oh, help us!"

And with a great cry Caroline fell upon the old man's neck.

Chapter xii.

VAUGHAN HESKETH made a second pilgrimage to Beacon's Cottage the next morning. The crisis of the previous day was safely past. He breathed freely. And now he might turn again to the thought of Madame de Vigny. A restless night had caused his ideas, only confusedly rebellious before, to arrange themselves in the most compact ranks of mutiny. Made courageous by a belief in his own immunity, he had now given the reins to those frantic steeds—his thoughts—his wishes; and they dragged him where they would. He was desperately resolved, with the indomitable resolution of a selfish man to win that which he covets, let what will stand between. His own interests, he said to himself, did not stand between. He was secure. The will was signed, and safely in the keeping of the family lawyer. Redwood, he

argued, was virtually his—he had no more now either to gain or to lose from Mr Hesketh. If the young man did not consciously calculate, among the other advantages of his position, the fact that his uncle could not, as the doctors said, linger many days, most assuredly it did unconsciously, and as a matter of instinct, weigh with him very forcibly.

So, nothing "stood between." Nothing but the pale face—paler than ever that morning—with the eyes looking unnaturally large, and the some-time rosy lips drawn closely together, in a strange sort of painful calm. The only thing that seemed to have power to affect that curious calm was, when Caroline looked at Vaughan's clouded brow and deeply-meditative aspect, or heard his voice, hasty and querulous, beyond all the transient impatience she had ever noted in it before. *Then* her look would soften, and her eyes would fill with sudden tears; *then* the cry of her heart would almost rise to her lips—"Oh, Vaughan, Vaughan! If I could only comfort him—if I could only help him a little!" But she dared not try. She dared not,

for she felt the solemn sense of the duties that were before her—duties for which all her quietest composure, her steadiest thought and courage, would be needed. No passionate indulgence of emotion must risk breaking down the floodgates of that heart of hers, where even now heaved and swelled the tumultuous tides of overwrought feeling. Caroline was learning a new lesson of control; till now she had hardly required it. In the free joyousness of her youth, she had experienced few feelings that she might not avow. All shades and degrees of concealment had ever been unnatural and obnoxious to her careless, innocent spirit. Where she loved, she had been loving, of look, gesture, tone; where displeased, voice and manner had told it too. Sorrowful, she appeared sad; mirthful, she was merry. The conventional hypocrisies of the world, and those sublimer and more heroic (as it is supposed), of modern novel and romance literature, each were alike unknown to Caroline. But now she guarded herself jealously. The few words she exchanged with Vaughan were quietly uttered. He would have

been surprised at her composure, had he not been too much occupied with his own meditations to notice it at all. When she was about to withdraw, to resume her watch in the sick-room, he looked up for a minute. She lingered.

"You won't want me, I suppose? Because I think of going for a long walk—to be out all the morning."

"It will do you good," said Caroline. "Go, Vaughan."

"I don't know where I shall go." He took pains to tell her the unnecessary falsehood. "But you won't be likely to want me?"

"No. Pray go, dear Vaughan." And she went from the room hastily; and when the door was closed behind her, she clasped her hands against her eyes, forcing back the tears that had been brought to them by this new evidence of Vaughan's restless misery.

For Vaughan,—truly he was restless, if not altogether miserable. A few minutes more he passed in walking up and down the room, busy with his reflections; then he started off.

It was indeed a long walk that he took; for twice he turned at the top of the dark pine-wood, and paced with long strides the narrow footpath. But at length consulting his watch, and finding that "lesson time" had surely commenced, he issued from the dusky shadow of the tall trees, and wound his way to the gate of Beacon's Cottage.

But a carriage stood before the usually quiet little entrance, and men were strapping boxes and imperials to the roof, under the direction of a most energetic and shrill-voiced *femme-de-chambre*.

"Non—non—ce n'est pas bien fait. Madame ne le veut pas comme ça. Madame est très exigeante. Prenez garde là. Doucement—doucement, avec cette boite là! Ah! C'est ça. Chut, chut, chut!"

Perfectly innocent of all meaning these accents fell on the honest rustic ears of the men, but Vaughan Hesketh heard also, and he gathered therefrom something of desperate interest to himself. Madame de Vigny was taking her departure from Beacon's Cottage, and evidently was bent on

no mere slight journey, or brief absence. Why was she going—and where? He must know—he must see her before she went—he must learn from her own lips. There he paused, and gnashed his teeth in impotent anger, thinking of Miss Kendal. Miss Kendal would be with her—there would be no possibility of private conference—every look, every word, would be watched by those jealous, keen eyes. And she would go, he might not know where; he might lose her irrevocably—for ever! If once she slipped from him, he could not tell—he could not insure to himself the possibility of finding her again. Fairy, witch that she was, she might elude him, like flame, or air, or light, or any other beautiful, fleeting mockery. He wrought himself up to a point almost of frenzy, thinking thus. Finally he arrived at a reckless boldness—a disregard of all considerations save the one. What was Miss Kendal to him? She could do him no harm *now*. Let her know that he did not care for Caroline! Let her know that his very life and soul—his whole capacity of love and of devotion—was solely and entirely engrossed and

lost in Blanche de Vigny! Let her know it, let her even tell Caroline: it would but save him the trouble of doing so himself. Let her do her worst. She should no longer frighten him from the goal of his desires. He dared her to harm him—he *would* have his will.

Of the *femme-de-chambre* he inquired if her mistress was to be seen. A doubtful response at first ensued, but further consideration appeared to render the thing more feasible. She would see; and he followed her into the house—into the drawing-room, where he waited.

How lifeless the room looked, though the fire blazed brightly, and the pretty fauteuil was drawn close to it, as if in readiness for its former occupant. The flowers flourished at the windows, and the outer world was far more serene than at his previous visit. A calm haze rested over everything—the outline of the hilly landscape was softened into misty indistinctness, joining the grey clouds, which themselves looked as solid as if they had been another and further range of hills. Stillness most profound reigned paramount within that

charmed apartment. No stir of children, no sound of voices disturbed it, though Vaughan listened with ears made doubly sensitive and acute. He hated to have to understand that they must all be gathered together in the breakfast-room at the further side of the cottage, equally out of sight and of hearing. She might leave the house, and he waiting there, ignorant and helpless. He chafed sorely; he was about to leave the room, that he might at least watch the carriage, to see that it did not bear her away, when a silken rustling without the door transfixed him. He leaned on the back of a chair, watching the door, prepared to spring forward when she should enter.

But she did not enter; instead, Miss Kendal trod deliberately into the room, looked at him with a fixed look of cold inquiry, and said, "Madame de Vigny is on the point of leaving. May I ask your message?"

"I wish to see herself," said Vaughan. His face flushed high; he advanced to the door, but there he was arrested, quite as much by Miss Kendal's clear steadfast eye, as by her tall and unusually

majestic presence. "I *must* see her," he said again, but in a more subdued tone.

"What have you to say to her, Vaughan Hesketh?" Miss Kendal sternly asked; "what is your mission here? Is it one you dare avow to me?"

"By what right do you question me thus, madam?" he returned, fiercely. "Who constituted *you* observer and censor of my actions? I am answerable to no authority of yours; I acknowledge no such tyranny."

"Nevertheless, you must be content at present to be ruled by such tyranny," said Miss Kendal, with grim complacency. "I shall certainly observe your actions, so far as they concern those in whom I am interested; and I am afraid it is likely that I shall censure them also. To go still farther, if I see occasion, I shall oppose—circumvent them to the best of my ability. I give you fair warning."

"It is unnecessary," he ground out the words between his teeth—"I have long been aware of your systematic plan of conduct towards me."

"That's a mistake of yours. You may have dreaded such a systematic watch upon you, but you have never had it till now. But we waste time, and mine is precious. What is your business with Madame de Vigny?"

"I shall only answer that question to herself; I will not be prevented seeing her. If you refuse to let me pass by the door, here is the window;" to which window he strode, and began to unfasten it.

"Take care—don't hurt my flowers," said Miss Kendal, coolly. "You are putting yourself to a great deal of fuss and trouble for nothing," she added. "The door is quite free to you, be assured; I have no intention of forcibly detaining you, as you seem to apprehend. There is no such conspiracy afoot."

"Where is she, then?"

"In the study; she is busy, and would rather not be disturbed at present."

"Did she say so?"

"I say so; and I tell no lies at any time, or for any sake. You behave strangely, young man. Do you suppose I attach such high importance to the

fact of your seeing or not seeing my visiter before she leaves me?"

"Then I can see her?"

"If and when she chooses—not before. It was she, not I, who objected to your request for an interview. I come as her ambassador, not as her jailer, as you appear to imagine.

In fact, Vaughan perceived that his impetuosity was needless, and somewhat foolish. He had been in so great a hurry to put into practice his new theory of reckless boldness, it had never struck him that it might be unnecessary—that Miss Kendal had not even said, though he had taken it for granted, that he was not to be allowed to see Madame de Vigny. The consciousness of his mistake incensed him. He was perplexed, also, as to what he should do. He paused, biting his lip. Contending passions were lashing him almost into frenzy. The dark face worked turbulently. He flung himself into a chair, and clenched his hands together in a kind of impotent desperation. He chanced to catch Miss Kendal's look; it was a curious one—a certain pity softened its uncom-

promising rigidity. He had never seen her look thus at him before. It suggested a new chance, and he snatched at it.

"I am almost mad, I think," he muttered.

She made no reply.

He looked up into her face earnestly and inquiringly. Anon, that expression gave place to a certain impatient determination to overcome the feeling of cowardice that weighed him down. What was there in her—a woman—that she should thus quell and daunt him, with her steadfast look and firm-set mouth?

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, with an effort at a *degag* air—"I beg your pardon for the haste with which I spoke."

He rose, and walked to the window.

"I can excuse you," Miss Kendal replied, drily; "I expected little less. I am aware that you are in a very critical and perplexing position."

He turned and looked at her with a look of defiance glittering in his eyes—curling about his mouth.

"Yes, I am aware of the fact," she pursued, quite unaffected by his glance; "Madame de Vigny has acquainted me with what she deemed your very unjustifiable behaviour."

"What do you mean?"

"Honourable men are not in the habit of declaring love to one woman while they are betrothed to another."

He looked at her again. It was useless to stand at bay thus—he should lose all, perhaps, by this show of bravado. She, though he hated her, and he *felt* she knew and hated him likewise, was the only person who had power to aid him, and she *must.*

"I confess," said he—"I confess I love Madame de Vigny. It may be my misfortune—nay, I know it *is.* It has involved me in much distress—much perplexity."

"And this being the case," Miss Kendal pursued, slowly, "you cannot marry Caroline."

She watched his face keenly, as he was perfectly aware.

"Heaven forbid I should do her such wrong!"

he said, fervently. "But there is my keenest pain—poor Caroline!"

"Spare yourself. You have doubtless enough to suffer on your own account. Your predicament is equally singular and unpleasant. You must be aware that the first step you will have to take, is to formally and entirely annul your engagement."

"You are right," he pronounced, folding his arms, with eyes meditatively fixed on the ground.

"You are prepared, then, to do that, and by so doing, to give up the future prospects which depend on that marriage?"

Vaughan started, and involuntarily he hesitated, but her clear, sarcastic eye bent on him forced him to reply.

"Everything must be given up. I will not play false to my own heart, or to Caroline."

He grew warmer as he concluded the sentence. Some after-thought appeared to lend him courage.

"Only let me see her before she goes," he added. "It is necessary that I should speak to her, tell her ——"

"Not before the engagement is at an end," she said, decisively. "You have no right to speak to her till then."

He writhed under her quiet, reasonable, terse sentences, delivered in that clear, metallic voice; but he had gone too far to afford either to resent or reject her counsels. The threads of fate seemed tangled in an inextricable confusion about him. It was with a sense of real and earnest misery that he buried his hot face in his hands.

"To Caroline—poor Caroline," he muttered, "it will be a severe—an unexpected blow."

"Never fear—she is not to be crushed even by that. Better she should *know*, at once. A solid reality, even of the gloomiest, is safer, better, than the fairest illusion. She has been deceived too long."

"Unwittingly on my part," he eagerly rejoined. But his listener shook her head.

"You deceive yourself if you think so. Since I have seen you together, you never loved Caroline Maturin."

"At least," said he, after a brief silence, "I love

her, too well yet, to bear to think calmly of the grief I shall cause her."

"You are too kind," sharply answered Miss Kendal, whom all such allusions seemed to arouse into uncontrollable spitefulness. "You must summon courage. Call to mind how your own proceedings are necessarily cramped, till ——"

He said nothing. As if from deep musing, he suddenly started, and addressed her again—"But before she goes you will let me see her?"

"For what reason?"

"I *will*—I *must* see her!" he cried, passionately. "If necessary, I will follow her ——"

"You best know the extent of your own daring. But Madame de Vigny can be indignant—can resent insolence."

"Insolence!"

"It would be such—you must know that."

Vaughan ground his teeth. "Nevertheless," he declared, "I would follow her—ay, to the end of the world. And I *will* know whither she is going."

"Oh, a truce to these spasmodic flashes! We

live in a century that laughs at such things. There is no mystery, and no need for such vehemence to discover it. Madame de Vigny simply travels by rail to London."

"To London?"

"I have told you. Now, Vaughan Hesketh, I think we have said all that needs to be said. You had better go."

"And not see her for a single moment!" he cried, in an agony of entreaty.

"I see no use—no object in such an interview." But, almost against her will, Elizabeth Kendal was touched by what seemed the one golden grain of reality in the young man's composition. "Very well," she added; "you may make your own adieux as she passes by." She left the room.

Vaughan still sat, with his hands clasped firmly together on the table before him, and his head bent down. Disturbed thoughts, wild, eager expectations, divided their empery over him. It was only by a determined effort that he held himself still, in at least an external calm.

It seemed a long time before the closing of a distant door, a sudden burst of children's talk, and presently the sound of approaching footsteps, made his heart beat stormily. Then he heard the faintest murmur of a voice among the rest—her voice. He sprang from his chair, opened the door, and met her face to face, as she came down the stairs.

She leaned on Miss Kendal's arm, and the children hung about her. She had only a smiling bow, perfectly graceful, perfectly unembarrassed, to bestow on Vaughan. She was in her travelling attire—rose-lined bonnet and furred mantle—and her maid just then brought her gloves to her, at the same time announcing that everything was ready.

"Will you—are you leaving us for long?" Vaughan forced himself to say.

She stood just within the doorway, drawing on her gloves deliberately, but ever and anon giving a smile, a caress, a few words, to one or other of the children. She glanced up at Vaughan for an instant—a single, transient, glittering glance—"I

do not know when I shall return. Adieu, Mr Hesketh! Saluez pour moi Mademoiselle Maturin, je vous en prie."

And again twining her arm within that of her old governess, she turned to go. Through the square hall into the porch, and through the well-ordered garden to the gate, whereat the carriage waited. The children followed in a troop, loud with their regrets that "cousin Blanche was going away," impetuous in their demands on her attention. She embraced them all, fondly but hurriedly, then escaped from them. The steps were down—the man stood by the door to assist his mistress. Madame de Vigny clung for a minute to Miss Kendal, kissed her hastily on both cheeks, then, drawing her veil over her face, she prepared to spring in. Another hand than the servant's held hers for a minute, and the flushed face of Vaughan met her eyes. He murmured a few words. She bent her head courteously—nothing more.

Another minute, and the carriage drove off, and the rest stood watching the brown fallen leaves that had been tossed aside by its relentless wheels.

The children had run outside the gate, and were tossing the withered leaves about, laughing, in their quickly-regained glee. Vaughan's eyes were strained forward with an expression eloquent enough of the bitter, desperate wretchedness he felt. Miss Kendal looked at him; she was not without pity, even where she had little liking.

"Will you come in again for a few minutes?" she asked him.

"No—no, thank you. I am going on a long walk," returned he, passing his hand about his brows wearily and perplexedly—"that will be best. Good-morning!"

Miss Kendal paused in the midst of gathering her little folk around her, as he said that, raised his hat, and turned to leave the cottage.

"Stop an instant! Tell me," she said, in a low but emphatic tone, "when shall I come to see Caroline?"

"When you will; I care nothing," he said, recklessly.

"But, understand! she must be told, and at once. Before to-night either you or I must tell

her—which shall it be?" Her uncompromising eyes fixed him—held him fast. "It ought to be done—it *must* be done," she further pronounced. "If you are afraid"—with a touch of the old irresistible sarcasm—"I'm not. Doing wrong is worse even than giving pain. She *must* be told."

"She *shall*," he rejoined. "Be satisfied—let it be as you wish."

And he was gone, and had plunged into the dark shadow of the pine wood, while Miss Kondal marshalled the children back into the house:—"In with you—quick, and to lessons! To the study at once! I'll be with you in two minutes."

And for the two minutes she looked out on the misty hills and bare-branched trees, thinking to herself, "I am a female Brutus—nothing less. I know that I have expedited the very stroke that is to wound her; for he is right—he is right. To think that it should be so, and such as *he* have the power to make my girl wretched. If I were not a Christian woman, how I could hate that man!"

She seemed to find some not altogether Christian satisfaction in deliberately and distinctly utter-

ing these words, and at the same time tying a small end of packthread, which she had been twirling in her fingers, into about a dozen very hard and very tight knots. And having so solaced herself, but still with an aspect of unredeemed gloom and disturbance, she sought her pupils, and prepared to enter on the business of the day.

Chapter xiii.

Caroline, informed that Miss Kendal awaited her in the study, entered to her there.

It was dim twilight, and half the room was in shadow. Only near the windows lingered a pale light, and about the hearth, where the fire burned and threw a sullen red glow around it. By the window stood the visiter. She drew Caroline towards her, kissed her forehead, and then abruptly asked for the invalid.

"He is asleep; he has slept much to-day."

"And you have watched much? Poor child."

A pause. Miss Kendal's face grew stern and stony in the grey half-light. But Caroline did not see it. Her own look was fixed on the vague shape of the trees in the garden, just dimly discernible through the overhanging mist. When her companion looked at her, it was to note with sur-

prise the serenity of sadness that her countenance wore: with surprise, and something else, that in a less matter-of-fact person than the straightforward governess, might have been called anguish.

But not a suspicion of either feeling lurked in the quick, dry tone with which she put her next question—"Have you seen Vaughan Hesketh lately?"

"Not since morning. He went out for a long walk. He is very miserable!" said she, falteringly.

"Yes, my dear; very miserable, without doubt."

"But—we shall both try to bear our grief." She went on—"We will—we will help one another ——"

But there she broke down. Her head drooped on to the hand of her friend that she held clasped in her own, and she gave way to the tears that had been so hard to restrain through the long day.

"Don't cry; why do you cry, child?" said Miss Kendal, impetuously. But as she spoke, she strained the young girl to her heart, in an uncontrollable passion of tenderness.

"I can't help it," Caroline presently murmured, "when I think of Vaughan. He finds it so hard to bear, I know."

"My dear, Vaughan has miseries of his own. One of them I am about to tell you."

There was a brief silence.

"Troubles that he never told me? I think you must mistake," she then said gently, but proudly.

The other paused for a minute, as gathering her forces together. When she next spoke, it was in a firm, full tone, that never wavered, but went on to the end, steadily, distinctly, and inexorably.

"I make no mistake. It is you who are, and have been, deceived. I am going to tell you in few words. Vaughan Hesketh betrothed himself to you without love. Moreover, since the betrothal, he has fallen in love with another woman —with Blanche, with Madame de Vigny. He loves her desperately and madly. Bear to believe it, Caroline, for it is *true*."

Again she drew her close. But Caroline broke from her with fierce strength, and stood apart, facing her; her young breast heaving, her head

erect, her eyes flashing with a lurid light they had never before known.

"How dare you—how dare you tell *me* this?"

She paused, drew a long breath. She had no words to utter what swelled her indignant heart.

"I tell you, because I believe it safest and best that you should know."

"You always disliked him; you were always unjust to him. But this—oh, shame—shame—shame!" cried Caroline, rapidly.

She was trembling with the violence of what now began to be mingled pain and anger, but she still held herself proudly erect in the front of the accuser.

"I disliked him—yes. I have been unjust to him—very likely. We are not infallible, and prejudice is strong. But this is no prejudice, and there is no room for injustice. I tell you merely *facts*."

"*You* to do this thing—*you* to speak so to me—*you*, whom I have loved, and counted my friend," Caroline said, with intense and concentrated bitterness.

The hearer tasted the gall; the stony face quivered a little.

"My dear, I can bear your scorn. I could wish—ay, so I could!—that I deserved it. Me false, and Vaughan Hesketh true, would make a very different world to you. But God has willed otherwise."

At that last solemnly-uttered sentence, for the first time, Caroline shrank back. But the next instant she lifted her head. In a somewhat softened tone, with a degree of stately compassion, she spoke again.

"What has deluded you? What can have put into your mind falsehoods so vile as these? Above all, what possessed you to bring them to me? To me—who know Vaughan as my own soul—who have loved him ever since I can remember what love was—who would trust him—trust him—before and against the whole world!"

Miss Kendal dashed her hand desperately before her eyes.

"Poor child—poor child—poor child! God comfort you!" she cried. Then, in a changed

voice, deep and steady, she went on—"But you *must* know the truth. You must believe, Caroline; there is a witness to the truth of what I have said. He cannot be far away. You shall appeal to him."

"To him? What do you mean?"

"One whom you will believe ——"

Caroline turned to Miss Kendal again, with even added haughtiness.

"What do you mean by all this mystery? Do you value your own word so lightly, that you think I shall credit it the more for one—or a thousand witnesses? You mistake."

"You *must* believe," the other said again, as if encouraging herself after her own stern manner. "You *must* believe. You must be told by Vaughan himself—Vaughan Hesketh, who confessed to me this thing you cannot believe—who bade me tell you. Summon him; ask of him!"

While she spoke, Caroline stared blankly at her. Then she put back the thick braids of her hair from her forehead, in a mechanical, helpless way. Indeed she felt, for the instant, like one half-awaking from some feverish sleep—altogether dizzied,

bewildered, overwhelmed with the weight of she knew not what.

With a start she roused herself. The girlish figure was drawn to its full height, as she walked with a firm step across the room, and rung the bell.

The servant entered.

"Is Mr Vaughan Hesketh in the house?"

"He has not long come in, miss. He is in his room."

"Beg that he will be so kind as to come down here—to me—immediately."

The door closed. Silence again, for three long, long minutes. It was not more; then the quick step was heard treading the hall, and with a sort of determined haste, a clashing hold was taken of the latch.

Forth from the shadow advanced the man's figure. Tall and fairly proportioned was Vaughan Hesketh. He bore himself now with a mien which balanced between dashing boldness and deprecating, regretful depression. But his face had a smouldering flush, a disordered, excited look.

Coward at heart, the utmost he could do was to keep up the shows of manliness; and that was no easy matter, for all his six feet of height, and his imposing visage.

He came forward; Caroline met him. There was a flash in her eye which told how, at his presence, the tottering trust stood erect again. Doubt, suspicion fled, for the moment; she could almost see the flapping of their black wings. She sprang to Vaughan. They could see each other's faces, by the pale, weird gleam of the wintry twilight. She looked in his; then, involuntarily and all unconsciously, shrank back a little.

"Vaughan," she said, in a shrill whisper, as if something veiled the voice that would have otherwise burst into a shriek, "Miss Kendal is here. She has said—she has told me ——"

She broke off. She sprang to him again, caught his hands, wrung them, and gazed into his face.

"You need only say it is *not* true," she went on. "Say it is *not* true!" she cried again.

"What is not true?" he asked, looking down

at her sadly for an instant. But she took no notice of his question.

"Say it is *not* true!" she cried again. "It cannot be true; Vaughan, you know it cannot. Yesterday—only yesterday—you loved me better than the whole world. You told him so—our uncle. How dare she say, Vaughan, what she *has* said? Tell *her* how false it is; tell *her* what I know already."

He glanced at Miss Kendal, who stood immoveably by the window. He did not look again at the girl's white face.

"It is our misfortune, Caroline——" he began.

The shriek burst forth then, and interrupted him. She let go his hands, and stood apart, gazing at him, though with eyes that seemed suddenly made soulless.

"No!" she said at length, in quite a low, quiet-sounding tone; "it is some dreadful, dreadful dream."

Her clasped hands fell before her; but her gaze never wavered. She stood in the same attitude, looking at him with those fixed, glit-

tering eyes, yet. Miss Kendal threw her arms about her.

"Come away, my child—come away."

"Vaughan, speak—speak!"

Her cry rose into a piercing shrillness. She struck aside the kind embrace, with that sort of instinctive, careless force with which we sometimes fling our arms in a troubled sleep.

"What can I say?" Vaughan said, in a half-soothing tone. "My dear Caroline, I wish ——"

"Stop!" And at last her eyes let him go; and as if some strange strength had existed in her by virtue only of that long gaze, that minute she reeled giddily, and caught at the thick folds of the window-curtain near her. Nevertheless, when Miss Kendal again sought to support her, she put her away, with a hurried, passionate gesture towards the window.

"Open it—open it!" at last she said. And not waiting for obedience or remonstrance, she herself threw it wide, and sprang out on to the misty lawn. The other followed her, and caught hold of her.

"Caroline, you must not."

"I must! Let me go! ah, let me go!"

The agony of the imploring cry was not to be resisted. Yet bitterly Miss Kendal repented her momentarily-loosened grasp, when the young girl, let free, darted swiftly and straightly along the broad path that led down the garden.

"The river! the river! oh, my child!" and the governess sickened as she followed.

But what was her utmost speed, compared to the frenzied rapidity of Caroline? She had lost sight of her before she came to the thick and mazy shrubbery which divided the garden from the water. She did not know the paths, and she grew bewildered amid them, long before she made her way through brake and underwood to the damp embankment, overgrown with tall, lush grass, that margined the sluggish stream.

But she had mistaken the girl's purpose. No such thought had place in her mind, maddened though she was. All she felt was simply the longing, the absolute need, to *get away*—to fly somewhere. The instinct of the wild animal—pursued

—wounded—in peril; the yearning to breathe in free air—in solitude; the unconscious, unrecognised desire to escape, as if sorrow could be fled from—as if grief were limited to place! All this, and more, was amongst the chaos of Carry's soul. No thought of where she was going, or for what! She did not think at all. At such seasons, the immediate present fills the whole horizon; and verily, it sufficeth. Second by second we live through such time, neither looking forward nor behind.

But she found herself on the river's bank—close upon the dark, ominous water; and she paused, and a thought cleft the tumult of feeling like a spear—a thought that made her heart leap with a sort of savage triumph over wo, at first. There was escape, there was freedom under that quiet, motionless tide. A strange freak of memory made her remember vividly how, only a few weeks before, she and her uncle had tested its depth by flinging in pebbles secured to a long string. Her very own laughter seemed to mock her, as if it yet lingered about the place; and the vision of the

grey-headed old man, so kind, so loving, so glad in her glee ——!

Ay, it was enough; that thought had crushed the other; the factitious strength deserted her—she sank down amongst the moist, rank grass, and remembered no more, till she found herself pressed close in Miss Kendal's arms, and heard her voice uttering irrepressible thanksgivings.

"I will go in. I will go to my uncle," Caroline kept repeating, in the first half-unconsciousness.

"You shall. Don't be frightened, my Lina," said Miss Kendal, tenderly, for she shrunk from her as if terrified. "Come with me. Your uncle must be awake, and will want you."

She suffered her to wrap her own mantle about her, and at first even allowed herself to be led back towards the house. Gradually, relentlessly, memory returned to her. She stopped short, suddenly, and strove to break away from her conductress.

"You had better leave me alone—leave me to myself. I know what I am doing. Only leave me to myself.

"No; I shall take care of you."

"Take care of me!" she repeated, in an agony of bitterness. "What do you mean? *Who* —— Oh, if you would but let me go!"

"My child, come with me."

She did not answer, only her resistance grew more feeble; not will, but strength was failing her now. She began to perceive her helplessness, and involuntarily clung to the arm which she had before been trying to put aside.

"Don't—don't take me in there," she said, piteously.

"Trust to me."

"*Trust!*" the word seemed to sting her into renewed vitality. "Whom should I trust—whom *can* I trust?"

"You can and should trust—God."

The reverently-uttered words touched her. The thought smote anew at her spirit, which had already been stirred from its long spiritual torpor into new life. Her head dropped upon her bosom, and she began to tremble exceedingly.

"Let me go in, then. Let me be quiet somewhere."

Miss Kendal led her as quickly as she could to the side entrance, leading through a long corridor to the back staircase. They met no one, as they passed along to Caroline's room. Once there, the governess heaved a sigh of relief. Caroline fell like one lifeless, soulless, feelingless, upon the sofa. Her eyes closed for a minute; but she was not unconscious. She drank greedily of the water placed to her lips, then sank down again.

A faint knocking at the door aroused her instantly; she sprang up.

"It is for me. My uncle wants me."

Two scared servants were at the door when Miss Kendal opened it. The doctor had just come, and had desired that Mr Vaughan and Miss Caroline should be summoned to the patient's bedside—immediately.

She heard; she was standing bathing her face with water, prepared, self-collected, as it seemed. Miss Kendal's stout heart had quailed; her cheek had whitened. Not Caroline's; the demand upon her courage, her fortitude, her energy, to one of her young, strong nature, was never made in vain.

The very need itself created the strength to meet it. She looked at her companion almost calmly.

"I know what it means; I knew it must be. Do not look so sad. He is very content. Now I am going."

"And I with you."

She made no objection, and they entered the room together. The grave doctor was leaning over the old man, counting his feeble pulse. Vaughan stood near. He crossed rapidly to Miss Kendal.

"I think it would be better ——" he began.

But she waved him away, and Caroline fled at once to her uncle's side.

Mr Hesketh smiled faintly.

"I am glad, my dear children," he faltered, and then looked inquiringly from side to side. "Vaughan—where is Vaughan?"

The young man drew near, but Caroline's uncontrollable shudder made him hesitate. His uncle looked at him, earnestly, as he took his hand into his weak, nerveless grasp.

"I have not done all my duty by you, Vaughan,"

he said, humbly. "God forgive me—and take care of you—and keep you right. Caroline!"

She crouched closer to him; a sickly dread oppressing her. But the old man's gaze in resting on her seemed to forget everything else. He let drop the hand of Vaughan which he had held. Gradually the meaning in his eyes altered, though they were still intently fixed on the girl's face.

"It is a long time—a long time since!" he murmured to himself. "Laura—you are the same Laura. Where are the beech-trees?"

He gazed round, in a mazed, bewildered way. Caroline twined her arms round his neck, in desperate fear. Never before had she heard her mother's name upon his lips.

"No, no," he said at length. "I know you, my child, Caroline. You were even as my own daughter—always. I made you happy? I may tell her so?"

She clung to him, speechless. His eyes smiled on her—till the last.

They took her away.

* * After a little while, the thick clouds that

seemed choking her, burst into a passionate rain of tears. All sense and feeling were lost for the time, steeped in that wild flood. From it she subsided into a motionless, pallid calm, that for awhile half alarmed Miss Kendal, who watched over her. But it did not last long. A sudden recollection overwhelmed her.

"*Now*, I must not stay here; now he is gone, this is not my home—any more," she cried, starting to her feet. "I must go—somewhere."

The sense of forlornness, of desolation, smote her. She covered her face with her hands. It was such a change, and she was half a child yet. She felt lost, bewildered, as if suddenly removed from the sunny garden she had known all her life long, to a dreary desert, bare, hopeless, trackless.

"My child, my dear child," cried Miss Kendal, the rare tears standing in her eyes, "don't speak, don't look like that. Come to me. I am waiting for you, longing for you; come!"

She held her arms stretched towards her. The girl raised her head, looked earnestly, yearningly,

for a moment, then, with a sad wailing sigh, she crept into her embrace.

"Take me away! only take me away from here!" was all she said.

"Truly, I will," said the governess, with a sort of gloomy triumph, as she gathered her close to her heart.

Chapter xiv.

So Caroline went with Miss Kendal to Beacon's Cottage. For three long, heavy days, the girl seemed almost yearningly to linger on the margin of some great illness, that would at once steep soul and body in its own strange oblivion. But such forgetfulness, even though it would be gladly purchased with much pain, seldom comes to those who crave for it most sorely. Caroline felt, oftentimes, as if the chords were so tightly strung, of sense, and thought, and feeling, that surely, *surely* they must break, unless some such relief were granted, and the tension relaxed. But no, full consciousness was to be her portion; she was to drain the draught of suffering, so new to her lips, to the very ultimate dregs. During those three days, it is not too much to say, she lived over

again, almost at every minute, the few hours of that dreadful evening. There is a curious faculty in the mind, during certain phases of its hardest trials, which causes it to arrange its very tortures as in a cruel orderliness; to make pictures of those past events which have wounded the spirit almost unto death; to set the story of the wo that is even yet writhed beneath, to a sort of rhythmic music, that *must* be listened to, ay, and felt to the innermost vibration of nerves already overwrought to a very anguish of sensitiveness. This strange ordeal the young creature's soul had to pass through now. Some natures are exhausted by much suffering into a species of torpor; some struggle through, and find a wild relief in the struggle, till physical strength fails them, and they are prostrated, and unconsciousness enwraps them, like a kind, protective shroud. But Caroline's nature possessed all the predominant characteristics of her untried youth: its strength, its passion, its resistance, its fearless daring, its wild incredulity of the very burden under which it staggered. All this made endurance a lesson most difficult to learn, and yet

her spirit was of that sort that does not bend or break, but *must* endure even to the end.

The days went by. Miss Kendal heard—though she did not think it necessary to tell Caroline—that Vaughan had gone to London. She heard, too, of his return, two days afterwards. She marvelled inly as to the results of his journey; although, in truth, she entertained but small doubt as to the issue of his suit to Madame de Vigny. A sardonic smile was all the prospective compassion she had for him. She felt, indeed, trebly steeled in pitilessness when she looked at Caroline. Meanwhile, more than one message of inquiry for Miss Maturin came from Redwood; to which Miss Kendal returned succinct replies. That lady watched her charge with a grim anxiety, a never-wearying care, such as might have been expected in her. She guessed something of what passed under the stony outside—the grey, moveless calm, that characterised Caroline's aspect during this time. She did not try to disturb it, by look, or word, or gesture. Her love it was, perhaps, which lent her the fine tact as if instinctively, to pursue that course,

best and fittest, and in truest sympathy with the young girl's tone of mind. No added tenderness did she suffer herself to be betrayed into; no observation, nor even anxiety, was ever apparent, to grate upon the jealous sensitiveness of the sufferer. She was simply and naturally herself, it seemed. Her habits were unaltered—she still gave the children their lessons, and their usual mirth was only enough checked, that it should not penetrate too rudely to Caroline's quiet chamber. Sometimes, she noted with a degree of satisfaction, that the wandering echo of a childish laugh reaching that still retreat would arouse its inmate for an instant from her trance-like immobility. She would look round, with knit brows and an irritable gleam in the hitherto-clouded eyes. With stoical contentment, Miss Kendal marked these signs of displeasure in her darling. Vitality—even though it were a vitality of pain—was what she desired to see reassert itself.

It was nearly a week after Mr Hesketh's death, and was the afternoon appointed for the funeral. Some instinct must have told Caroline of this, for

no word had been uttered in her hearing concerning it. The governess was almost startled, in the midst of lessons, to see the pale face, the unnaturally large eyes, looking wanly, but with an eager intentness, at her amidst the busy group in the school-room. The children stared in silent awe at the "sad lady." She gave them no glance in return, but only beckoned her friend.

"I want you. I must go to the little church to-day."

"Not to-day, my dear; you are not strong enough."

"I must go," she persisted—"I *must* go."

To all her persuasions and arguments, she replied only by a reiteration of those three stubborn words. Miss Kendal hardly knew whether it was most perilous to indulge or to resist her urgings. With a perplexity most unusual to her, she allowed the girl to wrap herself in a cloak, and then lead the way to the door. But there the difficulty was decided for her. The free air, the fresh gust of wind that swept across the hills, and greeted her as she stood on the threshold, seemed to bear some

mystical influence with them. Caroline staggered giddily, and fell to the ground.

She was quite helpless for the time. Miss Kendal lifted her, carried her into the bright drawing-room, and laid her on the sofa there. Even then, it was physical power, not mental consciousness, that failed her. Her eyes, wide opened, expressed a dumb, impotent anguish, very terrible to see. At last, it was more than the friend who loved her could bear, to stand by calmly and watch. She knelt down beside her, and gathered her in her arms; she laid the poor, drooping head upon her bosom, in the old, sweet, comforting endeavour, that so very rarely fails of its object. Caroline was insensibly soothed. The first natural gush of warm tears came to her—the first natural utterance of her misery escaped her.

"Oh, if he were here again! He was so good—he loved me so much. I could bear everything then."

And then, after a pause of passionate weeping, she broke again into unconnected sentences, involuntarily wrested from her, as it

appeared, of piteous, hopeless forlornness and desolation.

"Take comfort, my child," said the deep, tremulous voice of Miss Kendal; "you are not desolate; some love is left to you yet."

"I trusted Vaughan's love! Vaughan — Vaughan!" she cried, in a sudden paroxysm of desperation, as if the word once let loose defied her own power of restraint. "I believed in him, I looked to him for love, and help, and consolation —always. If he had died—if only he had died— so that I might have kept my love for him. It is so dreadful to think—to think that my Vaughan is nothing—worse than nothing! that he never lived —never! that I may not keep even his memory dear and sacred in my heart!"

She spoke as if to herself. It seemed a relief to vent in words the thoughts that had wrung her soul day by day. But a fuller consciousness soon followed. She looked hastily up into the face of her companion, and paused in her revelation. Even then, her calmer thought could not endure to impart the details, the proofs of his deliberate false-

hood. She fell back, and was silent. But, as she buried her face in her hands, many a cruel memory came to torture her with fresh corroboration of the long-planned scheme of deception, laid and practised by this man—the ideal of her girlhood, the hero of all the story of her life hitherto.

Ay, there was the sting that poisoned most festeringly the young, trusting nature—that had never yet known doubt, that had been fenced around with love, and care, and tenderness, during all the years it could remember. Miss Kendal was puzzled sometimes (not knowing how much the girl herself knew) that she at once penetrated to the sense of the complicated faithlessness of Vaughan Hesketh. She had apprehended that, in her woman's capacity for excusing faults and palliating offences, where she loved, she would have absolved her betrothed, after awhile, from all intentional deception. But that possibility did not exist for Caroline. It had been a dear blessing to her at that time, had it done so. But the unwarped sense of right in herself, would have forbade all such paltering with the truth, even if her own instinctive feel-

ing had not been beforehand with it. She had no mental cowardice in her. She could bear to understand, if she could bear to *feel*, that Vaughan had been treacherous and base; that he had used her love first as an instrument, then as a toy; that he had deceived the dying uncle who had been his benefactor, as well as the woman who had given him her all of love and confidence. That, in short, as she had said, the Vaughan that her love had invested with such dear and ideal attributes never existed. Old truths that, even when they were boy and girl together, Miss Kendal's clear eyes had seen, but hers had been blind to, came back to her now—tiny links in the great chain of evidence that, against her will, and to her cruel anguish, every hour of every day was adding to in her mind.

It was fatally clear to her now, why, and for what, the betrothal had been sought for by Vaughan. All Mr Hesketh had said to her as to the division of the property recurred to her now, far more vividly comprehended than it was at the time. And then, the day before that dreadful evening,

when, at the dying man's bedside, Vaughan had taken her in his arms, saying he loved her! Sometimes, as these and other recollections passed before her, she found herself unable to continuously realise them. She felt blinded and dizzy; sense failed her for a space, and a curtain of blankness seemed drawn between her and those hideous visions. It was so now. She fell back again upon her sofa, moaning feebly, and shielding her eyes from the light.

Miss Kendal drew down the blinds, and sat down beside her, holding one of her hands. She lay very still for so long a time, that at length the governess believed she must be sleeping. Very welcome was that belief. Surely the crisis was past, or passing, and a better and a calmer state not far off.

Miss Kendal softly left the room, to give some directions concerning the children. When she returned, with her basket of never-failing knitting in her hand, her charge still lay quiet—she had not moved during her absence. She sat down in her old place beside the sofa, and busily pursued

her knitting, while the early twilight fell, and gradually darkened the room and the outside world of garden and bare hills. Miss Kendal's knitting at last lay idle upon her lap, and she mused, with her eyes fixed upon the fire that now illumined the room with its peculiar, ruddy glow. In that glow, the slight figure on the sofa, in its long white wrapping-gown, looked more than ever fragile and spirit-like. The watcher could almost have found it in her heart to arouse her even from sleep, that by stirring she might break the eerie spell that seemed upon her.

But she did not stir, even when a clang of the outside bell caused the mistress of the house to look up from her thoughts, with a vexed impatience. Presently, the servant entered.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr Vaughan Hesketh would be glad ——"

"Hush! In the library," imperatively waved Miss Kendal, as she rose from her seat, and hurried the maid from the room. One backward look she gave at the couch, with its motionless, recumbent figure. As she looked, the figure stirred.

"I heard," said a clear but quivering voice. "Go to him; and then tell me what—what he comes for. Go quickly; come back, and tell me quickly."

"My dear, most likely it is some mere matter of business. Don't be disturbed."

"Oh, I entreat you to go to him at once," she repeated, in a sharp tone, too piteous to be wholly querulous; "and let me know—all; don't keep anything from me. Go."

She went, without more words.

The little library was steeped in shadow. The lamp, just lighted by the servant, burned only dimly. Miss Kendal's first care was to rectify that, and turn a full and brilliant light upon every corner of the room. Then, still standing, with stern and stately deliberation, she looked towards that corner where her visiter was seated.

"Well, sir; your business with me?"

Vaughan Hesketh, in his mourning dress, with white, haggard face and disordered hair, wore a different appearance to what she had expected; his voice, too, was hollow in tone—his manner subdued even unto humility.

"I come to tell you—to tell Caroline—that I am utterly ruined—utterly hopeless. I leave Redwood to-night—for ever. I would I could blot myself from the world as easily."

There was something of a studied inflection, his hearer thought, perceptible in the utterance of these desperate words. She preserved her rigidity and coldness.

"Indeed! What has happened?"

"Perhaps you are already aware," he answered, with what was apparently an uncontrollable burst of bitterness. "I know you were in my late uncle's confidence. Possibly he consulted *you* before making his will."

"No. He simply told me of a letter he lately received from some disappointed creditor of yours." Vaughan started—winced. "I did not know he intended to alter his will. By it, I understood all his property was to be yours. Is it not so?"

The slight shade of anxiety in her tone assured him that her ignorance was unfeigned. His manner changed.

"Such was, I well know, his original intention;

but he *has* made a new will. It is dated only the day before his death."

"Ah!"

"He leaves Redwood in trust for Caroline and her children, in the evident belief that we shall marry, according to his known wish and intention." He paused. Miss Kendal said nothing. "Our union was very near his heart, as you know," he added, hesitating, in an experimental sort of inquisition, perfectly apparent to the sharp shrewdness of his companion. There was another pause.

"So Redwood is Caroline's, then," said Miss Kendal, with a ruminative air; "and she is not left penniless, after all?"

"Penniless! You cannot suppose that, even had the original will stood, I should have suffered my friend — my dear companion — my once betrothed—to lack the means to which she has been accustomed all her life. Render me at least *justice*."

"I try, Vaughan Hesketh," she replied, dryly.

"I have been most unhappy—most wretched—in the entire affair. Would to heaven I had never beheld the friend—the syren—you yourself brought

to our quiet, happy Redwood!" he cried, energetically.

"Be careful of your dates, in justice to *me.* Remember Mrs Bingley's party, and various other occasions, during your stay in London."

"I am in danger of forgetting everything!" he returned, with a passionate tossing back of the hair from his forehead; "you do not know the complications that overwhelm me—of remorse, despair, misery, most complete and hopeless."

"I can guess," said Miss Kendal, grimly. "Doubtless, your position is uncomfortable enough. But you have earned it. You schemed, and your schemes have failed. You are foiled—not wronged."

"You are ungenerous," he called out, writhing under her cold, steel-like sentences; "you have no right to taunt me with my own bitter misfortune."

"I would be the last to taunt you; nay, had you only been true to yourself in but a single feeling, your reality in that should have my sympathy; your wretchedness would command my compas-

sion. But I believe I appraised you too sanguinely after all. Even what you called your love for Blanche de Vigny was but a gust of passion. It has blown by, even now."

He said nothing. He could afford neither to acquiesce nor to contradict.

"But to the point," resumed Miss Kendal; "your present business with me—what is it?"

"I came to tell you, as I have said; I thought it best that you and Caroline should learn the intelligence through me, before the lawyers make their formal announcement. Besides ——"

"Ay, what besides?" seeing he hesitated.

"I wish I could see Caroline," he entreated.

"That is quite impossible," Miss Kendal answered, with stern decision. "Go on with what you have to say to me. I cannot spare much more time."

"Your ears are poisoned against whatever I might say. It is useless for me to intrust my perplexity of grief to you."

"Heaven forbid you should attempt it. That, I presume, was scarcely the object of your visit."

Again he was silent.

Miss Kendal's patience was at ebb-tide. "You chafe me, Vaughan Hesketh," she exclaimed, in her resonant tones—her deliberate utterance heightened and hastened to something like impetuosity. "I can see no good to be gained by your presence in this house. What object you propose to yourself I know not; but out of my old experience, my mind misgives me, that when you plan good for yourself, it means evil to another. Go your ways."

"But how shall I know—how hear?"

"Whatever it is requisite you should know, shall be written to you. Is there not a penny postage? Communication by pen and ink is the very thing for you and me," she cried, in much wrath. "I have told you before, you chafe me, and you take up my time. I object to both those inevitable results of your visits. Come here no more."

She opened the door—she marshalled him forth. The innate cowardice of his nature instinctively succumbed to her sweeping decision—her imperative, uncompromising will. He was compelled to

follow her. But infinitely enraged, and at the very last daring stage of desperation, he looked around him as for some straw to which he might catch, of extraneous help and support.

The involuntary carefulness with which the governess passed the drawing-room-door fired him with a thought. They are often boldest who are most slaves to fear. He seized the handle of the door, opened it, and before he could be prevented, he stood in Caroline's presence. Miss Kendal, the mischief done, followed him, closed the door, and took her place beside the sofa, with all apparent composure.

The young girl was seated, her head erect, her bearing quite free from any trace of weakness, or even of suffering. She had, perhaps, been listening to those footsteps along the corridor, and knowing that Vaughan was so near, she had felt little shock at seeing him actually before her. Howbeit, she looked at him unflinchingly. Only the convulsive motion of the pale hands, clasped closely upon her lap, showed that the calm was little beyond merely external.

He returned the look for an instant. Then he approached her, eagerly — "Caroline — Carry! Say one word to me. One word of comfort! Indeed, I need it sorely."

Miss Kendal impulsively put out her hand, as to check his advance. Caroline laid her own upon it, and drew it back.

"Don't, dear friend. Let him ——"

Exultant at the gesture and the words, the young man forgot his caution; he threw himself at her feet, and took her hand.

"Carry—my own true Carry! do not suffer any human breath to come between us. It is to *you* I speak—with *you* I have to plead—*you*, who have enough of truth and generous, forgiving love to blot out all the past—all the mad frantic past which lost you to me. I was wild, I was frenzied, bewitched. But I have returned to my old heart—the heart that only you ever possessed—ever had dominion over. Take it, Carry; forget, forgive, and in your great love let all be engulfed and lost. Carry, listen to me."

She was listening. She had loosed her hand

from his hold, but regardless of the gesture, he continued his passionate appeal. She looked on him, the while, with a strange look. It was not in all his soul to interpret its meaning aright.

"Carry," he went on, "I am miserable—very miserable. To know that I have deserved my misery, does not make it more bearable. To know, too, that I have made *you* miserable, maddens me. You, most innocent, most loving, most faithful! Forgive, pity me!"

Her lips formed one or two words, but no sound issued from them.

"In you, with you, my salvation rests! I am lost, if I lose you. But I shall not, cannot lose you; my guide, my companion, my sweet, pure Carry. You love—you love me, and by your love I hold you, and I claim you—mine!"

He would have put his arm round her, but there she recoiled from him. She moved aside towards Miss Kendal, and clasped both her hands close. But still she looked fixedly on the man at her feet. There was some fascination for her in that wild, haggard face—the unveiled face of her prophet.

And he, emboldened by that gaze, again said, "You love me, Carry. You *must* forgive, for you love me!"

Then spoke Caroline, in her young voice, clear and ringing as a bell—"I forgive you; but I love you no more—I love you no more."

Distinct, incontestable came the words. Then she rose, gently put aside Miss Kendal's proffered aid, and walked firmly, steadily from the room, without another word, or glance, or sign.

Chapter xv.

The executors of Mr Hesketh's will, the trustees of the property, were Elizabeth Kendal and George Farquhar—"my old friend's son, in whom, from my observation and experience of him, I have much confidence," ran the terms of the will. It was well for the former that her pupils left her to stay with relations about this time. Woman of business, of decision and action, though she was, she might have found her multifarious duties too much for her. Besides, she was cruelly anxious over Caroline. She longed to get her away from the neighbourhood, to give her change of air, people, and scene. Change, that panacea for youth! It would seem as if the young, under calamity, possessed the power of shedding their past existence as birds moult their feathers; so often do they rise from the sack-cloth and ashes of a past grief into new and bril-

liant life. But this seemed scarcely likely to be the case with Caroline. True, she woke from the heaviness of the first dark wo, into a serene quietude; true, she soon began to interest herself in the duties of her new position, as prospective mistress of a large estate. No energy was wanting: she spared neither time nor thought, and had even the virtue to be patient over all the tiresome legal formalities which were necessary. With unwearying perseverance, she read over a vast number of papers, written over in that peculiar round text, so hateful to many an unfortunate, till she almost began to *think* in the prim parlance of attorneys and conveyancers.

But for all her cheerfulness, her patience, and her evident steady determination, girl as she was, to conquer, and not be conquered, in this first hard battle of her life, that life had changed, and changed to one of which the hues were more subdued, the tone chastened. *Peace* was hers. It could but be so, seeing she had done no wrong. The Christian spirit of submission dawned in her soul. But happiness is at once less and more than peace. Though her life was serene and harmonious, the spontaneous

music, the sweet, gushing joyousness was gone, altogether gone, for the time.

Perhaps the first human brightness that came to her was when she had succeeded in her endeavour, had completed her long-cogitated plan, and had obtained sufficient money to pay Vaughan Hesketh's debts, a list of which was obligingly furnished by that gentleman. For the rest, £200 a-year was left to him by the will, and Caroline only waited her coming of age to increase it. She found a great satisfaction in thus doing and resolving. Money he should not want. If she could, she would gladly have given him all that wealth that had been so fatal a temptation to him. Luckily, as Miss Kendal often thought, such a Quixotic act of munificence was out of her power.

But at length the business arrangements were all over, and Mr Farquhar, who had come down to Redwood at intervals during their progress, might take his leave with an easy conscience. He had seen very little of Caroline. The start of pained remembrance which he had noted in her at their first meeting, acted as a most effectual warn-

ing to him, not to give more occasion for such spasms of memory than was absolutely inevitable. Thus, he saw her seldom; he actually conversed with her—never. It was impossible that he should not at once penetrate into the true state of the case as regarded her and Vaughan, but no word uttered he, of surmise, inquiry, or observation. This was a reticence for which Miss Kendal esteemed him highly. Her regard, indeed, for him was sufficient for her to take him into her counsels, on the eve of his departure.

"Miss Maturin needs change. These law matters concluded, I see no reason why she should not have it. Do you?"

"Assuredly not. Although nominally a minor, under your guardianship, I imagine Miss Maturin is very much her own mistress."

"And her guardian's also, perhaps. Well, she wishes to go to France, to St ——, where her early childhood was passed. Do you know anything of it?"

"I have been there. It is a quaint, old place, and the country round is pretty. A thorough

change from Redwood. You could hardly do better, in my judgment," said Mr Farquhar; and he made his adieux as soon as he courteously could.

But the day before their departure, Caroline, to Mr Farquhar's great surprise, gravely asked to speak with him for a few minutes in her own little library. Thereinto he followed her, and awaited her communication. It came, slowly and difficultly, at first.

"I recently discovered, by means of a letter my dear uncle received—very lately—a letter signed *Jules Montignon* ——"

He started, quite fiercely. "Don't utter the name, Miss Maturin. It pollutes your lips."

"No; please listen." She went on—"I discovered, I was saying, by the statement of that person, that you—*you*, Mr Farquhar, are one of the creditors of Mr Vaughan Hesketh."

"You must say no more of these things. I entreat you to rest content. The whole affair is now satisfactorily arranged."

"Excuse me—I *must* say more," Caroline pro-

ceeded, with a visible access of dignity. "I conclude, as you do not deny the assertion, that it is correct. Therefore you must permit me to rectify my unintentional omission. The debts must *all* be paid. It would have been my uncle's will, and I cannot be gainsaid in obeying it."

"You do not understand ——"

"Oh, I do—I'm afraid I do," she cried, quickly. "Oh, Mr Farquhar!" suddenly turning to him, with a flushed face, and eyes dewy with earnestness, "am I to find even *you*, whom I trusted so perfectly, in whom my uncle had such confidence, even as all the rest. Were *you* one of the fatal companions who led Vaughan Hesketh deeper and deeper into evil? *You* the associate of gamblers—of men whose name you justly shrink to hear! Oh, sir, I am grieved—I am grieved!"

He heard her to the end. It was certainly neither shame nor sorrow that lit his face as he listened. It was with no ignoble hardihood that he met her eyes with such a steady gaze.

"You are mistaken, Miss Maturin," he said, gently and deliberately. "I was *not* one of those

associates. My tendencies to ill, my weaknesses, lead away in a widely different direction. My influence in those matters, over Vaughan Hesketh, I dare affirm to you, looking in your face as I do now, was always such as yourself would have pronounced rightful. I did my best to save him. For the rest, and to explain what seems to you inexplicable, I can but ask you to *trust* me—again. You said you did so—once?"

"Yes," she answered, for he paused. She looked straightly into his face, and read it aright. "I cannot doubt your word," she said. "I beg your pardon if I have done you injustice in my thought."

"You owe me remorse for such injustice," he said, rapidly, and in a low voice; "you do not know of how much you rob me, when you think hardly of me."

He stopped himself abruptly.

"But I will not tax your faith in me too far," he resumed, in a changed tone. "Some day I promise to give an explanation of the circumstance that has misled you. Will that suffice?"

"And I must ask no questions now?"

"Unless you will not trust me. But you will?"

"Yes," she said, softly. "Good-by, Mr Farquhar. I suppose we shall not meet again for a long while. Good-by!"

She stretched out her hand. He took it eagerly, pressed it reverently, then let it go, and himself turned away. An abrupt leave-taking, Caroline thought, and yet—something in her heart kept her from dwelling at all severely on its abruptness.

And the next day they left England, Miss Kendal and Caroline; and about a month after their arrival at St ——, came a long letter in Mr Farquhar's handwriting, addressed to Miss Maturin, which, as an isolated exception to her general habit, she read to herself, and entirely kept to herself. Unsuspicious Miss Kendal inquired what that large epistle was about:—"Business?"

"Partly—not—yes, partly. About Vaughan's business—partly," came the hesitating reply, as unusual to the straight-spoken, clear-voiced Caroline, as was her reticence. And then she fled the room with her letter, and the conscious roses on her cheeks. For truly, though the closely-written

pages contained many business details connected with Vaughan Hesketh, there was much—much about the writer himself that could hardly come under the category.

And Caroline wept over it till the roses were drowned from her face. But her heart never misgave her, as she wrote two or three lines of answer:—

"Let us be friends always. But no more can ever be, for *that* possibility is plucked out of my life by the roots—for ever. But believe that I prize your friendship—that I wish to be your friend. CAROLINE MATURIN."

This sent, and the long letter placed carefully away, the girl bathed her face, and summoned courage and self-possession to meet Miss Kendal's eyes. Whether that lady observed, or was obtuse on this occasion, she made no remark, and asked no more questions about Mr Farquhar's letter.

* * * * *

Four years the young heiress and her faithful friend remained away from England, traversing almost the whole of the Continent during that time, and making thorough acquaintance with various

spots of classical and picturesque celebrity. Tidings more than once reached them of Vaughan Hesketh. That he had entered the army was the first—some influential friend having procured him a commission. Then they heard that his regiment had sailed for Calcutta; and the next news came through Lady Camilla Blair, who was emphatic in her admiration of the handsome and agreeable young officer, whom she had found to be a nephew of Mr Hesketh of Redwood. "How cruel of the old gentleman to adopt him, and then despoil him of his inheritance for a mere whim!" was the comment of the outside world, impersonated by Lady Camilla. Finally, an officer in the same regiment, whom they met at Rome, informed Miss Kendal of the fact of Lieutenant Vaughan Hesketh's marriage at Calcutta to the daughter of his general. And, as not very long after the announcement of this union the bridegroom was gazetted to his company, there can be little doubt but that it was a prudent as well as a suitable alliance.

That same year, Madame de Vigny married again. In passing through Paris, on their return

home, the travellers had the pleasure of visiting Madame la Comtesse at her magnificently-appointed hotel in the Faubourg St Honoré. Her taste for luxury, brilliance, and gaiety was now amply gratified, and so long as these things preserved their attraction, doubtless she would continue a happy woman, in her own way.

"But," said Caroline, waking from a reverie, as they journeyed the last few miles towards Redwood, "I don't envy her. Nor, indeed, would I change places with any one I have yet seen, unless it were you, ma mie. Or, perhaps—but then—he is a man. And I have not the least remnant left of my childish ambition. I wouldn't be a man for the whole world."

"My dear," said Miss Kendal, with much subdued amusement, "may I ask the meaning of all that eloquence? Who is it you do not envy, and who is it you might, perhaps, wish to be, if he were not a man?"

"I was thinking of the countess. Though she seems so brilliantly happy, though she apparently has everything she wishes for, beauty, wealth

influence, and troops of friends; still, I would rather be almost any poor woman. Isn't it strange?"

"Not at all, Lina. Her wishes are not yours; her views, aims, and plans of life, differ, widely, too widely, from my good, conscientious girl's. You recognise life's duties; she only looks for its pleasures. Poor Blanche! She may yet learn a truer contentment, though, possibly, at much cost. But who is your other example? Who is the knight sans peur et sans reproche, whose estate you would condescend to take upon yourself?"

"I did not say that," remonstrated Caroline, with a slight blush; "I only said I could imagine, that if —— At least I meant ——"

"I know what you meant, you cautious little person. I only want the name. Suppose I guess it."

"I was thinking of Mr Farquhar," she said, quickly, but with a certain degree of dignified reticence beginning to be evident, "His life seems very much what a good life should be, either of man or woman. I think he must be happy."

"Do you?" her companion asked, dryly and doubtfully.

"Indeed I do," she went on, with some warmth. "Active, useful, the doer of good deeds, and the sayer of noble things, if he is not content, who should be? He wields his self-acquired power wisely; his influence is always exerted for the right. Yes, I think he ought to be thoroughly happy."

"So do I. But men are perverse animals, my dear, and seldom are precisely what you would expect them to be. Mr Farquhar does not strike me as thoroughly happy, though I believe him to be thoroughly good. Some private care, perhaps, of which we know nothing, subdues the bright colours we only see. It is often so."

"Yes," said Caroline, absently.

"Though, after all," pursued Miss Kendal, "I am presumptuous in forming an opinion about his or any one's state of mind, from such a brief glimpse as we had of him in London."

"Yes," said Caroline, again. "Ah! there are the tops of the pines on Crooksforth Hill!" she

presently cried, eagerly peering from her window. And they both became silent as they drew near home.

It was a solemn, though not a sad, coming home. Every turn in the road, every tree, every pathway, teemed with associations, some irretrievably and unmixedly bitter, others sweet and touching. Caroline's imagination was too powerful a part of her nature, and her sensitiveness too intense, for her to pass with impunity through any such ordeal. She had tasted consolation from the true Source. The cruel wounds of the past had been healed, and she had risen above all pain, all suffering, to a serenity very sweet and satisfying. But, albeit her life had grown anew — although it was no crushed spirit, no weary heart, that she brought back with her to her old home—she still felt the shock, and had to bear the penalty. Nevertheless the pain came openly and wholesomely, and was borne bravely and well. It was neither fretfully struggled against, nor for one hour was it weakly yielded to. She set herself to work at once. She was now of age, and being neither extravagant nor

avaricious, she was possessed of a sufficiency to enable her to carry out her plans, and to build a school on Redwood estate—a school after her own heart, to be conducted on her own plan; that is to say, after her own plan's generous enthusiasm had passed under the judicious revision of one or two older and more experienced, if not wiser heads than her own. And in the building this school, and superintending that which already existed, Caroline found plenty of happy employment, both for head and hands.

And so the time sped on. Summer again shed its glory and brightness over Redwood. Again Caroline spent long afternoons under the birch-tree on the lawn. Again she had musings, and it may be, dream-land was hers yet. But now, she usually held a book in her hand, and it was pored over sometimes, and even, sometimes, she would attract Miss Kendal's attention to some passage in it.

Miss Kendal liked to bring her knitting into the shadow of the lawn on these June afternoons. She could knit, and think, and look at Caroline, marking the soft, tender beauty that had taken the place

of the fresh girlishness of five years before; noting, with silent thankfulness, the serenity of the broad brow, and the quiet contentment that shone in the eyes, those steadfast eyes, that, through all chances, and changes, and trials of the five years, had lost no iota of their frank and truthful directness.

Clear and pure, too, came the voice, as she spoke, without looking up from her book: "I like these old poets. Listen, ma mie. Here is a quaint melody to which this scene goes well." And she read:—

"'The soote season that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill, and eke the vale;
The nightingale, with feathers new, she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come! for every spray now springs;
The hart hath hung his old head o'er the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;
The fishes float with new repairëd scale;
The adder all her slough away she flings;
The swift swallow pursueth the flies small;
The busy bee her honey new she brings.
Winter is gone that was the flowers' bale;
And thus I see among these pleasant things,
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs."

"How curious it is," said Caroline, after putting aside the volume, and looking around her for a minute or two, "to note that continual envying of nature's changed and renewed life, that some poets and philosophers feel and express so strongly. As if trees and flowers were the only things that spring again! As if birds, out of all creation, monopolised the power 'with feathers new to sing!' As if the soul had not its seasons, as well as the earth: —its autumn of loss, its winter of torpor and gloom, its spring of resurrection, its summer of fruition and full-shining content. Is it not true? Have we not all these?"

"Truly, I think so," replied her friend. "And, moreover, I even think that it is with souls as with the earth, and that till the autumn's sorrow and the winter's darkness hath befallen us, the true spring cannot renew, nor the fulness of the summer's sun bless us. They who never tasted tribulation, cannot truly tell the sweetness of content. Things are very evenly balanced, Lina! I think even our shortsighted vision may see that, sometimes. Through all wo, all suffering, all heaviness and

weariness of heart and soul, we should do well to remember that

'God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!'"

"Even so," said the younger lady, thoughtfully. Her head leaned against the silver stem of the birch, and her eyes looked their peculiar look straight into the light, as if attracted by some kindred influence there. The gold-brown hair shone as of old; its ripple-like undulations glistened in the sunlight. White and pure was the brow as ever, but a chastened placidity had taken the place of the daring, restless, ever-inquiring, ever-seeking spirit of youth. It was as though something which had been sought was at last found. And truly, so it was.

"Bless me!" cried Miss Kendal, suddenly; "that looks like Mr Farquhar standing there, at the dining-room window. He has not been here since the day you came of age. A stranger, indeed! Is it really he, my dear?"

Caroline started, glanced up at the window, and then deliberately rose to her feet. The serenity

of her face was usurped by a sudden, crimson flush. "It is Mr Farquhar," she said, with forced composure, and stood still while that gentleman advanced towards them.

"A sudden visit," remarked Miss Kendal, as she gave him her hand, in cordial greeting: "is anything wrong? You don't look quite yourself, I fancy."

"I am very well," he gravely replied; and added, after a brief pause, "I should apologise for this abrupt intrusion, but it was my only opportunity of bidding you good-by. I am about to leave England."

"Indeed! Not for long, I hope?"

"We shall be very sorry," said Miss Maturin, politely.

"It is uncertain how long I shall be away. I am going with a government mission into Egypt," said Mr Farquhar.

Then, as if wishing to waive the subject, he stooped to pick up the book from which Caroline had been reading, and made some indifferent remark concerning it.

"Come," said Miss Kendal, gathering her knitting apparatus together, with a certain feeling that there was some restraint hanging in the air about them, "our tea-time is near. We keep primitive hours, you know, and besides, travellers need refreshment. Suppose we go in?"

She led the way, and the others followed. But some perverse influence apparently retarded Mr Farquhar's steps. On the terrace he paused, and turned to look lingeringly round. "It may be my last look," he said, half-apologetically. For Caroline had involuntarily paused too, but in a minute she moved slightly onward, then paused again, to pull carelessly at the laden branches of a fuschia which grew in graceful luxuriance beside where they were standing.

"Miss Maturin!" he went on, in a changed tone, "let me speak frankly, for one minute. Do not think that I am weak enough, foolish enough, to rashly intrude *my* regrets, *my* hopes, fears, or wishes upon you, for a second time. I am aware that my first, almost involuntary confession, four years since, has lost me what I had of your frank regard,

your friendship. I suppose it could not be otherwise. I begin to understand more clearly how inevitable that penalty must be which even your kind heart's earnest endeavour (I believe in *that* implicitly) was powerless to overcome. Do not look pained. I shall learn to bear it."

She had half uttered some words of deprecation, but at his last sentence she turned away, deeply colouring.

"It is strange," he pursued, "that you yourself, as a young girl, among these very hills and pine woods, were the first to strongly touch that chord of my nature which now arms me to endure your indifference. Mine is no blighted soul; it is no forlorn, hopeless, aimless tide of life, that turns away now, to cross the smooth current of your existence—never again. Years ago, such a trial might have goaded a rebellious spirit—mine was so, then—into madness. Now it spurs a more courageous one on to action, to find, where and how Heaven pleases, the peace it may not have of its own choosing. Whatever the issue, whatever has been the pain, I thank you, I bless you, for the

good that your unconscious influence wrought upon me from the very first minute that I saw you."

She said nothing; nor moved, nor looked up.

"I believe," he said gently, "that what I have said it will be pleasant for you to know, and remember, now and henceforward. You would not be yourself if you felt no sorrow, no sympathy, for one who gave his best wealth, his all of precious gifts, in vain. It is to tell you that it was *not* in vain—that I look to the life before me, hopefully, expectantly; that I am resolved to meet it with faith and energy—it is to tell you this that I have spoken. You understand me?"

"I do," she replied.

"You will give me your hand? Let this last evening be like the old times; for we are friends, are we not?"

"Yes, we are friends," she said, distinctly. But she did not give him her hand. She began to walk hurriedly towards the house.

"Let it be as you will," he said, rather proudly. But the instantaneous, impulsive glance she lifted to his face, melted his pride electrically. "For-

give me," he cried; "I know I wrong you, when I believe you less than most true, most kind, most good. Now, I have done."

They were at the little wicket which led to the side entrance, both having apparently forgotten the more usual way of ingress by the low windows. Simultaneously, Mr Farquhar and Caroline laid their hands on the latch; the latter drew back hastily, while her companion, with less apparent embarrassment, undid the fastening. But his foot was on the skirt of her dress, and in her quick gesture, a great rent was torn in the thin muslin. It is singular how the merely conventional is apt to enter even into epochs of deep and fervent feeling. Mr Farquhar's apologies and regrets were most earnest and unfeigned. For Caroline, her behaviour was far less praiseworthy. She stood, holding the fractured breadth a little apart, regarding it with intentness, and an expression almost of anguish quivering at her lips.

"Never mind! never mind!" she repeated, over and over again, in reply to Mr Farquhar's self-condemnatory regrets. "It does not signify at all,

not the least;" and as she turned to go in, an extraordinary and uncontrollable burst of tears attested her insincerity.

"Stay!"

He sprang forward, and *would* take her hand. With the other, she tried to hide her face, while he tried, as eagerly, and more effectually, to see it. Lower and lower the sunny head drooped, and the sobs came fast and strong.

"Caroline, what does it mean?" he asked earnestly, almost to sternness. "Tell me; I beseech you—I charge you to tell me."

"It is foolish—worse than foolish," came faintly and falteringly. "I do not—I don't ——" With a great effort she raised her head, drew her hand away, and looked at him. "I am not so heartless as you think. I am grieved," she said, steadily—"grieved to think of your approaching voluntary exile."

"You are grieved—why?"

"For the sake of the good and noble career you leave behind you."

"Nay; I embrace one, it may be, more widely useful."

"Your friends," she went on—"your tenantry ——"

"Caroline, it is best for me to go! I told you truly that I go bravely and contentedly. But it is best for me to go—for England is too dear—England is too full with thoughts of home—of you. In a word, it is best for me to go, because—because I love you."

He watched her relentlessly—she had no chance to hide a shade of an inflection on her face—it was better to dare his gaze than to tremble under it. She looked at him again, and the look sufficed.

"You *would* not deceive me, even unwittingly," said Mr Farquhar. "Answer me truly: what does that look mean? What are your thoughts saying?"

She tried to speak steadily and clearly, but it was a very stammering, faltering, ill-constructed sentence that came out at last. "Saying, that—that if you only go away because you love me, it is—it is unnecessary—for you to go."

* * * * *

"Well, my friends," observed Miss Kendal to herself, as, after losing sight of them for at least

an hour and a-half, she perceived them quietly walking up and down the terrace, as if no such institution as tea existed in the world, "I hope you can appreciate patience as well as you practise deliberation. I am hungry."

This final remark she loudly repeated at the open window, till she succeeded in attracting their attention.

Then Caroline came running towards her—"What is it?" said she, with the most crimson assumption of unconsciousness in her face. "Do you want me?"

"Do I want you? I want my tea! And so you've torn your pretty new dress? Heedless child!"

"It was not I—it was the gate—at least it was at the gate—the little wicket," she explained.

Mr Farquhar put his arm round her, and led her into the room, in the full [illegible] of Miss Kendal's eagle glance.

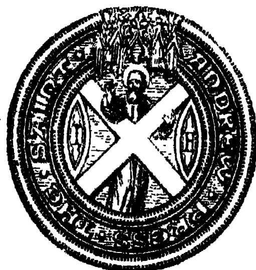
"Blessed little wicket!" said he, more than half-solemnly.

Caroline broke from him, and was clinging to

her old friend, hiding her face again. Miss Kendal looked at Mr Farquhar, with an unwonted quiver of her steady mouth, in silence; then, as was her habit, she tried to veil the too-great earnestness of the moment with a jest.

"My dear," she said, sententiously, bending over "her girl," "I can darn it, you know—I darn so beautifully. It isn't worth while to fret, though it *is* a new frock." But for all her philosophy, a single great tear fell on Caroline's hair as she spoke.

"Come," said she, almost defiantly looking at the said tear, "let us behave as wisely as may be." She held out her hand to Mr Farquhar—"This child has no mother but me, no father, except God. See that you love her, faithfully, purely, singly, to make up to her those long years of orphanhood—forlorn years at the best. She deserves to be happy—my darling! God send she shall be so, at last!"



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